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No. 53 THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK CO. Cleveland, Ohio Vol. V

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No. 53 THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK CO. Cleveland, Ohio Vol. V

THEN OUT FROM THE UNDERGROWTH, ACROSS THE RAVINE, STRODE NO LESS A PERSONAGE THAN YANKEE RIFLE IN HAND.

Denver Doll's Device;

OR,

THE DETECTIVE QUEEN.

BY E. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY.

"Hi yar! ki! yi! didn't I done gone tell yer? Thar it goes ag'in, honey. Et's de cry ob a chile, suah sart'in!"

And Fitz Walter August Christie, more commonly known as Walt, rolled his comical eyes toward his three companions, his ebony countenance glowing with triumph.

But his three companions hovered closer to the lonely camp-fire that crackled briskly upon the gulch bottom, as if they were in no wise eager to venture forth to ascertain from whence and whom had emanated the piteous wailing cry that had twice faintly pealed forth on the chill November night.

The camp-fire burned in the mouth of a deep narrow gulch of forbidding aspect, and at a point where it opened out upon a bar or projection, three sides of which were washed by the waters of a dark, swift, silent river, whose appearance was no more inviting than the wild mountainous country that gave it birth.

Four men were gathered about the camp-fire, with rifles, picks and shovels lying by their sides, showing them to be prospectors; and over all fell the first gentle flakes of the earliest autumnal snow-storm.

The darky was the spokesman of the crowd, and appeared to consider himself virtually the leader. He was a trim, spruce-appearing fellow, and had more than ordinary sagacity and intelligence expressed in his face.

One of his companions was a ponderous Dutchman of enormous girth, who grunted at every breath like an over-fattened hog and rejoiced in the happy cognomen of Jacob Strauss, or Yakie, for short.

Both he and Walt were attired in miners' habiliments and were well-armed.

Next to Yakie was huddled up an almond-eyed Chinaman, about whom there was nothing particularly noticeable more than that he still wore his native queue, and had rather a crafty expression of countenance, not uncommon with the Celestials found in the West.

The fourth person was a prisoner, bound to a tree near the fire—a man of some two-and-twenty years, in whose face was reflected little that was villainous or bad.

Why he was held in confinement will presently be developed.

The words of the darky, as stated, had no startling effect upon his auditors. Chug, the Chinaman, gave an uninterested yawn, and Yakie grunted louder than ever.

"Dot vas a yildcat!" he growled.

"Golly! I knows more in one minute dan dat whole Germany," Walt asseverated. "I say dat was de scream ob a chile, done gone suah, an' de common instincts ob our natures should cause us to go fru blud an' water to save dat yar kid, sah!"

"Off you vants to go, vy, dot ish all right I don'd!" Yakie declared. "My skin vas vort.. too mooch to sell it to der vildcats und lions so cheap."

"He! he! lions in America!" sneered Walt. "You's done can tole a lion from a coon, fo' suah! Yar's Chug; he even knows dat dar's nuffin' like lions in America—hi, piggy?"

Chug looked sagacious, but shook his head.

"Velly muchee liar in 'Melica!" he declared. "Chinaman nebber lie allee samee likee 'Melican man."

Just then came another cry floating into the lonely camp on the keen breeze—a moaning, piteous sort of wail peculiar to a child in distress.

Walt could stand this no longer; he leaped to his feet, his eyes rolling ludicrously and peering about in the darkness.

"I jes' wish to goodness Denver Doll was hyar!" he cried. "Dat yar cry done gone chill all der marrer in dis chile's bones, 'deed it does. Yar's some lost baby in de mountings, an' I 'clar' to de Lor' it's our duty to go to de rescue. Will you go 'long, Chug?"

"Chinaman belly big coward!" the Celestial said, hugging the fire closer. "No good at fightee. No go wid black 'Melican man."

The man at the stake, who, while listening and watching, had evinced considerable interest, now spoke up.

"The black terrier is right!" he said, in a voice of command. "That is no animal cry. There is undoubtedly a child in distress, somewhere in this vicinity, and it is your duty, as men, to go to its rescue. If you are too cowardly, pray grant me the privilege to go in search of it. If I fail to return, you can forever know Tom Jarvis is a liar and an ingrate."

Yakie Strauss took his pipe from his mouth long enough to put his thumb sarcastically to his nose.

"Not if der Consditution of der United States vas acquained mit herself, und she rather dun she vas!" he chuckled, knowingly. "You vas a purty shmardt rooster, maybe somedimes all dei w'ile, Misder Jarvis, but you don'd vas can come some foony pizness ven Yakie Strauss vas around. You pelong to der robber gang off McParland und Co., und ve yoost hold you till der boss comes."

"You will find your mistake when Denver Doll comes," Jarvis replied, seeming to be a little worried at the Dutchman's flat refusal. "I am in no way acquainted with McParland, nor do I serve him in any respect."

A grunt from Yakie was all the answer this assertion elicited.

Christie had crept out of sight up the gulch.

Satisfied that he could get no assistance among his own comrades, the plucky fellow had made up his mind to go it alone, in a venture to solve the mystery of the wailing cry.

He had left his rifle at the camp, but had a trusty revolver drawn, ready for use, and thus equipped, crept on in the direction of the place whence came the sound.

It was some ten or fifteen minutes ere he

heard another cry—but he was all attention at the time, and consequently gained a more accurate bearing.

In half an hour he had gained a sort of transverse ravine, several hundred feet above the level of their camp, and at some distance from it.

Here his search ended, in the face of a spectacle that caused him to dart back aghast.

Lying upon the rocky earth, her tattered garments partly whitened by the falling snow-flakes, was a young woman—one who had recently possessed great beauty, but whose face was now white and pinched, the probable effect of privation.

Upon the ground, from a wound in her side, was a clotted pool of blood—and she was so rigid and still that Walt was satisfied she was dead.

Near her, upon the ground, bundled in a shawl, sat a little girl of about four years of age, sobbing as if her heart would break, her tearful eyes fixed upon the lifeless body of the murdered woman.

The white in Walt's eyes enlarged very considerably, as he took in the scene, but where terror would have taken hold of many of his race, pity seized upon his kind heart, and he stepped forward to do whatever he could.

"Yar, honey, jes' done gone cry no more," he said, kneeling beside the child, and noting that it was a remarkably pretty one. "I'se jes' gwine to take de best ob care ob you, I is. Is ye cold, honey?"

"Me *so* told—me so hungry!" moaned the little one. "Mamma gone to sleep, an' I tan't wake her up!"

Tears entered the negro's eyes, and he seized the child in his arms.

"Come! we'll jes done gone an' get warm an' somethin' to eat, honey, and den dis yar chile will come back after yer mammy."

The prospect of warmth and food caused the little one to look up gratefully into Walt's ebony face, and her tears immediately subsided.

Before leaving the scene of the ghastly crime, Walt perceived that one hand of the woman clutched a tiny silver box, while the other contained a crumpled paper.

Realizing the necessity of obtaining all possible clew to the crime, the darky secured both box and paper and thrust them into his pocket; and, with the child in his arms, he set out for the camp.

Denver Doll had arrived in camp, during Walt's absence, coming from over the river, in a boat.

To state that she was a splendid specimen of young womanhood, would be drawing it mild. Few were they who had met her, who could not candidly say she was queen among young women.

Of just a trifle above the medium hight of women, and cast in nature's happiest mold, her figure in its neat-fitting suit of male attire would attract admiration in any crowd, for its symmetry and grace.

Her face was fair and expressive, with a power to change from pleasantry to sternness in an instant, and though usually wearing a happy look, there lurked an expression about the brilliant black eyes, and the marble forehead, that told of some past trouble, which would not be forgotten.

Her rich brown hair fell in rippling waves half-way to her waist. A plumed slouch hat of snowy white; an elegant suit of gray, and patent-leather top-boots, with a diamond-studded "b'iled" shirt, collar, and a sash about her waist beneath the coat, made up her costume, and gave her an appearance at once dashing, and characteristic of the wild roving existence she led.

For she was a "character," a strange one, too. Where she belonged, no one knew, for she was here, there, and everywhere; what was her early history, no one could say.

It was no secret that she was a detective; it was no secret that she was a terror to, and hated by, the ruffian and outlaw element of the mountains and mines; it was no secret that she knew her own business, was a keen, nervy, discerning, but respectable woman of the world.

Nor was it a secret that she had sworn to break up the notorious road-agent gang of John McParland, who, in their unknown mountain fastness, had for months bidden defiance to law and order, to say nothing of the scores of bold robberies they had committed.

McParland and his men had also sworn dire vengeance upon the brave girl from Denver, and it seemed only a matter of time when the bitter enemies must triumph, one over the other.

So that it was little wonder that the Detective Queen's eyes lit up with a victorious glitter, when she walked into her camp, and saw one of McParland's right-hand men imprisoned to a stake.

"Jarvis!" she exclaimed, pausing near him, and leaning upon her rifle. "I would sooner have expected a visit from McParland, himself. Where'd ye blow him in, Yakie?"

The Teuton glanced around him before he answered.

"Vel, I dells yov how id vas!" he said, rising, and swelling with bravado.

"I found dat veller sneakin' mit der outside off der camp around, und dells him he better surrender right avay quick or I plow his prains in—und dat vas all der vas of it. He obey me yoost like a leedle shackass mule."

"Muchee big lie!" Chug commented. "'Melica Dutch no ketchee man."

"Of course he didn't!" Jarvis chimed in. "I was led into camp by the ear, by that cursed nigger of yours. He caught me napping, and waltzed me in, wi' a six-time-slugger under my left norstril!"

"You vas a pig t'ief—you vas liars!" Yakie cried, enraged that he could not for once steal the thunder of the occasion. "I plucks your eyes mit pluing quicker ash dunder."

He undoubtedly would have wreaked some sort of vengeance upon the young outlaw, had not Denver Doll pushed him back, sternly.

At this juncture there was a clatter of horse's hoofs on the rocky bottom of the gulch, the sound coming from the depths of the gulch, as it ran back into the mountains.

Denver Doll and her two companions seized their rifles and stood on the defensive, expecting

an attack; but, to their surprise, they beheld only Walt Christie emerge from the gloom, carrying a child in his arms.

"Cl'ar de track dar, chil'ren!" he cried; "hyar we'se a-comin' to de golding weddin'. Bring out de 'freshments an' de nussin' bottle, for dar's a new citizeng added tew de populating ob Shinin' Bar, fo' suah!"

Later, a search was made for the body of the murdered woman; but, although the pool of blood was discovered, the body was not to be found!

It was one night's mystery!

CHAPTER II.

SHINING BAR UNDER A NEW LIGHT.

A YEAR later we will look down on Shining Bar—not now the same lonely camp wherein we opened our story, but the same location transformed into a prosperous mining-camp.

The bar or neck of land that projected into the river was thickly built up with shanties and tents, but they were irregular as far as streets were concerned, there being but one street having any pretensions thereto, and on this was located the few business places of which Shining Bar boasted.

One general store supplied the wants of the camp so far as edibles and cloth were concerned, in addition to being the post-office.

Then, there were the saloons where a pilgrim could fill his being with "coffin-nail," get robbed either by pickpockets or gamblers. Also a theater, playing the acknowledged reigning successes of the season; a smithy, and a mammoth ore-mill, which did the crushing and smelting for several mining districts besides Shining Bar—so that the Bar bowed gracefully to the fact that she was a place of considerable importance.

Her population, both floating and permanent, was a heterogeneous mixture, in which the rough element prevailed to a large extent.

A Vigilance Committee had been organized, however, and under Harry Burke's efficient captaincy had in a measure established order, although the laws were all home-made.

In such a state we find Shining Bar, on looking down upon it a year from the opening night of our story—a far pleasanter night, however, with less chill, and no snow.

A crowd had collected outside the post-office, to await the coming of the evening stage from Glander's Gulch, which was unaccountably late, being overdue by three hours at the least.

In the East, such a fact would scarcely have elicited an inquiry; but the fact that John McParland still made things lively for mountain stages and travelers, gave cause for uneasiness in Shining Bar.

For the daring desperado had been more than ever bold of late, since Denver Doll was no more seen in the mining-towns, and the report had gone forth that she had met her death.

"Tell ye ther thing looks squally fer ther stage, boys!" observed Markward, one of the Bar's rising young citizens. "I'd hardly take chances bettin' that McParland hasn't stopped the hearse to-night."

"Injins an' alligators, no—nuther would I!" chimed in Old Pap Mount, stroking his long white beard. "By ther eye-tooth uv old Jupiter, b'yees, et seems miter cur'ous as how we can't hev some one among us as ain't afeard ter sail in an' clean out thet outlaw gang, root an' branch. Ef I war as young a boyee as I uster be—great horned ace uv Taos—I'd undertake the hull job myself!"

"What's this! what's this!" a dapper individual demanded, pushing forward with a notebook and pencil in hand; "is there an accident?—has anything happened?—was any one hurt, and how many! Do tell me! I'm a reporter, gentlemen—yes, sirs, a newspaper correspondent. I represent the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, published in Cheyenne, and 'pon 'onor, if I do say it, I'm counted one o' the finest! Jones is my name—Chawles P. Jones. P stands for Pygmalion, instead of Pat or Peter, as some vulgarly suppose. Ahem!"

The advent of Mr. Pygmalion Jones, while it did not create any decided sensation, served to momentarily check the conversation of the crowd.

He was a new arrival at the Bar, and new arrivals were invariably regarded with suspicion.

As this was the first time Jones had made known his business, a laugh followed his introductory, Old Pap Mount being the only sober-visaged individual in the crowd.

"Pilgrim!" he said, with solemnity becoming a full-fledged monk, "d'ye feel averse tew chawin' down a leetle piece uv advice, tendered by an old nugget from Pike's Peak?"

"Advice? Aha! 'tis a great blessing to receive it from the aged, and to profit by it. Proceed, venerable father; I listen with eagerness!" Jones responded dramatically.

"Injins an' alligators! Thort ye'd not go back on an old landmark like yer uncle!" Pap grunted. "D'ye see the knoll up ther gulch thar, an' that slab stickin' up?"

"I see it, sir—the memento of some past and gone enterprise, I take it."

"Jes' so, pilgrim:—

"A feller came a paper to start,
At ther shanty on ther knoll,
He claimed he was most orful smart:
Most wond'rous news he tole;
But he hadn't fairly got a start,
'Fore we chucked 'im in a hole.

"A thunderin' lie one day he told,
About old Slaughter Steve,
Who w'ars his pistols in his boots,
An's *bad*, ye may believe:—
He said as how old Slaughter hid
Five aces up his sleeve.

"Six bullets did ther job fer *him*;
His *Herald* failed to bloom:
We burnt ther shanty over thar,
An' it's served him fer a tomb;
So ef you don't git up an' dust,
Fer *you* thar's graveyard room!"

A grim silence reigned as Pap concluded; a host of ominous visages were turned toward the reporter of the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, with looks that were not calculated to inspire him with feelings of animation over his prospects as a journalist in Shining Bar; so with a deep sigh, he turned and walked mechanically away.

While Old Pap winked, knowingly.

"Here's to us, young fellers!" he said, as he took a rip from his private flask. "That feller should know thet thar's no hereafter fer reporters in Shinin' Bar."

"We were talkin' about some one who could sail in and capture McParland, the road-agent," said Markward, grimly. "You bet thar's not ther man livin' as can capture a feather out of that galoot's cap. Even Burkey is afeard ter leave camp. Maybe a reward would turn up some chap as hes got more luck than sense."

"That might easy be!" a voice exclaimed, and a stranger was for the first, seen standing near. "Supposing you nominate some first-class sort of a reward, and see how quick I'll gobble on to it!"

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Verner, one of the solid men of the town—a speculator, rich and influential. But even though he asked the question, a close observer might have surmised he only asked it to conceal the agitation that seized upon him, at sight of the stranger.

A strange smile came upon the face of the new-comer, as he gazed for a moment at Verner.

"I fancy *you* have no need to ask that question?" he replied, in a tone that expressed very little admiration for the man he addressed. "But, for the information of all concerned, I am usually called Yankee, which answers all the purposes of a name!"

Yankee!

There were men in Shining Bar, who had heard of the name before. A name it was, peculiar to the mining regions of California; it belonged to an individual who never worked, more than to indulge in an occasional fight, or to win a fortune by the turning of a card, and then very foolishly—as the worldly men of the mines viewed it—turn around and donate it to some charity, a 'nervy,' practiced, well-educated, thoroughly experienced man-of-the-world, though he had not long left his teens behind.

Straight as an arrow, of a little over medium hight, and well proportioned; possessed of remarkable muscular development, hard flesh, and great agility of motion, little wonder that he had the notoriety of being a formidable antagonist as well as a friend to "tie to."

In face he was handsome, with clearly cut, regular features, a firm but pleasant mouth, and dark liquid eyes that had a power of magnetic intensity in their gaze; hair of a dark-brown hue, and worn in tight short curls over his shapely head, and a handsome mustache upon his lip.

His garments were of coarse but serviceable material, the pants being thrust into a pair of top-boots, and the jacket open at the throat, exposing to view a marble-like neck. A slouch prairie hat rested upon his head, weapons of fine finish were in his belt, and a repeating rifle in his hand, completed an *ensemble* at once striking and dashing.

The announcement of his name caused the crowd to stare, but had no more visible effect upon Verner, than had the first sight of him.

"Yes, I'm Yankee, and I'd like no better job han to adjust the noose about the neck of McParland, the road-agent, I assure you, gents. Propose a fat reward and I'm your man!"

"The people of Shining Bar will undoubtedly use discretion in regard to whom they pay rewards," sneered Verner, as he turned away.

"If you mean that as an insinuation, Valentine Verner, permit me to remark that I do not deem it of the slightest importance what *you* think," Yankee retorted, as he sent a stern glance after the speculator. "I did not come here to have trouble with you, but if you prefer, I can undoubtedly accommodate you!"

Verner walked away in silence, and the stage came booming down into the town just then, loaded with passengers, inside and out, and with Mickey Pryor, the boss Jehu of the road, cracking his long-lashed whip over the eight-in-hand.

But it was a sorry-looking crowd the stage brought in that night, for the looks of the passengers told the old, old story, as well as words could have done—the stage had met McParland and his merry men.

Even Pryor was sullen, and set his horses back upon their haunches, before the Post-office, with a will, and allowed the passengers to get off without a word.

"Gone to thunder!" was his simple announcement, when Wells-Fargo's agent came forward. "'Twasn't no use to be mulish; they were ten ter one ag'in' us, an' hit us in a new place!"

A howl of anger went up from the crowd, for many miners and some speculators had moneys or valuable property coming to them on that stage, as well as letters and papers.

So that for the remainder of that evening Shining Bar was in a turmoil of commotion over the robbery, and the streets were never for once deserted of an excited crowd.

Among the passengers who alighted from the stage, Yankee noticed the figure of a woman, clad in deepest mourning, with her face so well concealed as to be invisible to outward gaze.

Shining Bar boasted of a commodious boarding-house, which was conducted in a quiet orderly manner, to the exclusion of all the rough element, and thither the veiled woman wended her way, as if familiar with the town.

Yankee watched her until she had disappeared with an interested gaze, and even then he so sauntered about the Bar as to keep the boarding-house under surveillance.

"Strikes me I have seen that woman before, under other circumstances," he murmured, "but I cannot place her now. It is the graceful, agile motion of her figure that recalls her."

Half an hour later Denver Doll left the boarding-house—for Denver Doll the veiled woman was—and advanced toward the Post-office. Then a light of understanding entered the Sport's eyes.

"Ah, I have it now! I thought I was not mistaken. The Queen of Detectives, eh? I know her, but she does not know me. I wonder what brings her here? Probably after the devil, McParland. Ha! ha! ha!"

He watched her go into the Post-office, and come out again, when she betook her way to the long frame shanty called the "Monaco."

Here, night and day, various games were hotly contested, and money exchanged hands

nearly as fast as in the European resort from which the den took its name.

"I'll get a cigar," Yankee decided, "and then I'll see what success the pretty spotter has at gambling—if so be that is why she goes there."

Down the street he spied a cigar-sign above the door of a cosey little shanty, and sauntered that way. The sign read:

"CRYSTAL CARROL,

"DEALER IN CIGARS AND TOBACCO."

Entering the pigeon-hole store, the Sport saw no one, as he pushed open the slat door and entered the adjoining room, which proved to be a costly fitted-up little bar-room.

A young woman stood behind the counter.

And Yankee uttered a cry of astonishment as his gaze rested upon her.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

THE girl behind the bar seemed less surprised than the man, and judging by her expression, she had never met the Sport before, while he appeared to believe that in her he had met some former acquaintance; and the more he gazed the stronger seemed to be his conviction that he knew her.

"Dora!" he said, at length.

There was deep feeling in his tone—there was love in his glance—his face expressed the emotion of one greatly moved.

But the young lady stared at him in blank surprise.

"You are evidently mistaken, sir," she spoke, quietly; "I have never borne the name of Dora."

"You are—"

"Crystal Carrol."

"I am Yankee—otherwise Charlie Eisler. I was greatly impressed, at first sight, that I had met you before under different surroundings, and I am not entirely convinced yet but what I am right. Dora?"

He called the name again. His every expression of voice told of a deep, undying love for Dora, whoever she might be.

Miss Carrol did not seem highly pleased at his yearning stare and pleading words.

"I am sorry to say that you are greatly mistaken," she said, with a soberness that did not belie her words. "I am not Dora, although I may chance to look ever so much like her."

"You do look like her; and if I am mistaken I trust you will excuse my—my—well, my impudence," he said. "A choice cigar, please."

She evidently was not offended, for, instead of setting forth the "custom" box, she drew from beneath the shelf a box of real Havanas.

"I trust you will smoke at the expense of the resemblance," she said, pushing his money back, with a little laugh. "Such things do not happen every day, you know."

"I will smoke; and looking through the clouds that arise from my cigar, I will not, rest assured, forget the giver—nor the past."

She watched her eccentric customer light his cigar and depart, and sent a lingering glance after him, as if sorry to part with him.

"Yankee, otherwise Charlie Eisler," she said, thoughtfully. "It strikes me I have heard the name before, although I cannot tell where."

She gazed out of the door, even after he was gone, a thoughtful expression upon her face and in her eyes. She was trying to recall to memory something of the past, and yet that something refused to be recalled.

A fair maiden of less than nineteen summers, was Crystal Carrol, with features of exquisite symmetry, eyes blue and soulful, and hair that few of her sex could rival, while in figure she was *petite* and sprightly.

But even though so seemingly delicate and inoffensive, she was master of a firm expression of mouth and eye, that told better than words that she had a spirit of her own, which could not be trampled on.

For some time after Yankee's departure, she was buried in reverie, until a footstep sounded in the doorway and she looked up to behold the man of reportorial proclivities, who had introduced himself to the men of Shining Bar as Charles P. Jones, of the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, of Cheyenne.

The very appearance of the fellow was sufficient to provoke a smile from Crystal.

"Ah! good-evening, my pretty miss, if it is not too late, nor too eariy," was the initial of the *Cyclone* man. "Have you any very, very choice cigars, say two for a dollar?"

"Cert!" Crystal replied, without offering to produce them. "I have some, two for ten dollars. I dare to presume they would fit you."

"Well, aw—you see—that is, my resources are not so very inexhaustible, just at present," he stammered.

"Well, perhaps cigars at a dollar each would suit you!" Crystal said.

"Ah! in the good old times"—and Charles Pygmalion dived reflectively down into his pockets—"in the good old times when a man could sit in his easy-chair and write a half-column paragraph at fifty cents a line—then was when the representatives of the press could smoke the best of cigars. But on the 'umble pittance of ten a week, a man must nowadays curtail his expenses. Tell you what I'll do, pretty miss. I'm reportin' for the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, of Cheyenne. If you will trust me for ten of the one-ers, I'll take 'em, an' ye can charge it to the firm!"

Crystal shook her head.

"Cash talks here," she said, briefly.

"And smoke too!" Jones added, with a laugh, and he seized the box from her hand, which she was about to restore to the shelf, and slid very quickly out of the door.

Crystal made no attempt to follow him, but there was a confident little twinkle in her starry eyes.

"I'll remember that customer a few days," she remarked, with a nod of her pretty head.

Leaving the store of Crystal Carrol, Yankee made his way to the gaming saloon where he had shortly before seen Denver Doll enter.

It was one of the typical dens of the Western mining-town, with its heterogeneous collection of *habitues*—therefore why describe it?

After wandering about the large apartment for some time, Yankee finally espied Denver

Doll engaged at a game of cards with Mr. Verner.

Sauntering around, the Sport finally succeeded in gaining a position immediately in the rear of the speculator, in order that that personage might not be aware of his presence.

The game was poker, and Doll won, and as the pot was for a hundred dollars a side, Verner naturally felt not a little chagrined.

"You are very lucky, young woman," he declared, sourly. "If you have sufficient assurance, we will make it five hundred for one game—just one game, you know—no calling for revenge!"

"That is satisfactory to me," Doll replied, calmly, and with the declaration she produced a roll of bills, and counted out the sum named.

Verner did the same, although he had the smaller roll of bills of the two.

The game was then played, and the winner was the Detective Queen, who pocketed the stakes with a *sang froid* that was inimitable. Verner took this loss more quietly than he had the first, but there was an ugly glitter in his eyes that became as wicked as that of a corraled rattlesnake when he beheld the quiet smile of the Sport, who stood just behind his chair.

"Very good; you have won, and won honestly!" he said. "Your success, however, was abetted by the signals of the individual behind me. Charles Eisler, you are a sneak and a spy, and I challenge you here before all, to meet me in mortal combat—a battle of life or death between us."

Yankee was somewhat surprised, for he had fancied that his presence in the rear of the speculator was not known to him.

"If you really challenge, I accept," the Sport answered, calmly. "What weapons do you nominate, Lord Vanity?"

"The choice, I believe, according to the code of honor, should be left to you," Verner replied, with intense bitterness of tone.

"Then I will take advantage of that right," Yankee said, grimly. "Each man shall strip to the waist, and the weapons shall be salt and pepper, at *three yards*, propelled from suitable shot-guns. One gun shall be loaded with powder, in addition to the salt and pepper, but the other shall not be. We will draw sticks to see who has the shot with the salted gun. No matter who wins, he must stand up and level his weapon in duelistic fashion, and accept of the general results. Is this agreeable to you?"

Verner could not very well say no.

He had proposed the duel himself, and that by the code gave Yankee the choice of arms; so he stiffly inclined his head in acquiescence.

"Will some kindly disposed person lend us a couple of shot-guns?" Yankee asked, looking over the crowd.

A handsome pair of muzzle-loading fowling-pieces were tendered, and after being examined, were accepted by the Sport.

"Now the next thing we want is an honest and reliable man to load one of these weapons, as directed."

"Pray allow me the honor of acting for this duel!" cried Jones, rushing up. "I have fought and won more than fifty duels myself, and being the favorite reporter for the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, I can do honor to the occasion. Jones is my name—Chawles Pygmalion Jones, of the *Cavortin' Cyclone*."

"Guess not, Jonesy. I reckon I'll act in this matter, if ther old court is aware of herself," Denver Doll cried, arising from the table. "I'll see that the mill is conducted in square shape! Load it with salt and pepper, did you say, pard?" and she took the guns.

"Yes; give the one weapon a good dose, and now, while you're at it, we will retire to the outside and arrange things."

"I'll fix the weapon all right, never fear," Denver Doll said, as Yankee led the way, and the crowd followed him out of the room.

Procuring the necessaries from the bartender she retired to one corner of the room, where she proceeded to load one of the shot-guns as she had been directed, leaving the other leaning against the wall until she should be ready to take them both from the saloon.

As soon as she had it loaded she left the saloon.

Out in the main street of the town the motley crowd was congregated beneath the rays of the moon, which lit up the secene with mellow radiance.

The distance had already been measured off, and the antagonists were ready and in position.

Denver Doll paused midway between them, and looked from one to the other, at the same time holding up a coin between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand.

"Mr. Verner," she said, "you have the choice of choosing lots in this affair. Which shall it be—heads or tails?"

"Heads up!" Verner cried.

The girl tossed the coin into the air, and it fell upon the hard-pan bottom of the street with a sharp ring.

Verner and Yankee advanced and peered down at it.

"Tails up!" Doll cried. "Yankee, the salt and pepper gun is yours. Take your position; all ready, you spectators on the sides, for this hyar's got to be a squar' thing!"

Verner received his weapon with an oath—the oath, more particularly, when he gazed around him and perceived that there was no hope for him to avoid the ordeal.

Yankee received his weapon, an expression of triumph upon his face.

"Get to your places!" Doll cried. "Mr. Verner, your gun is loaded with a blank dose of powder, so that can do your antagonist no harm. You must fire, nevertheless, at the given signal. Are you ready, gents?"

"Ay!" spoke up Yankee, raising his gun.

"All ready!" Verner growled, evidently not relishing the dose in store for him.

"Correct!" the Detective Queen declared. "Fire at the word three. *One! Two!* Three! *Fire!*"

They did fire, each volley being discharged almost simultaneously.

The result caused a murmur of astonishment among the line of spectators.

Verner was dancing about frantically, rubbing his chest and face, and howling with agony—for if none of you readers have ever "been thar," let me remark that a volley of salt

and pepper is not the most delightful thing in the world to encounter.

And Yankee!

Instead of standing triumphantly to witness the antics of his adversary he had thrown up his hands with a cry and fallen to the ground.

Leaving Verner to himself, the crowd, headed by Denver Doll rushed forward to ascertain the cause.

Blood was trickling from a tiny hole in his left side, which had been made by a bullet, and although he yet retained his senses, he was evidently hard hit.

"Great Heaven! you are shot!" Denver Doll cried, kneeling beside him.

"You should know. You had charge of the weapons!" Yankee cried, sternly.

Denver Doll looked pained and anxious.

"True, but as God is my judge I did not put shot in either weapon, nor was I aware that either was thus loaded!"

"The gal is right!" Old Pap Mount cried. "Cavortin' crockydiles! how could ye hev got a single rifle-bullet wound out o' a shot-gun? Some one else has fired at ye, Yankee Doodle—great war-hoss of Taos, *yes!*"

"Perhaps!" the Sport said, dryly, as he in vain attempted to arise. "Will some one assist me to some place where I can have my wound dressed?"

"Oh! bring the gentleman to my store—I have a couch he can lie upon until he can find better accommodations!" cried a feminine voice, and Miss Crystal Carrol stepped forward.

Few of the miners cared about having a sick man in their house, and therefore the kind offer was accepted; the Sport was borne to the little store, and laid upon a couch in the saloon apartment. A doctor was then sent for.

CHAPTER IV.

DENVER DOLL'S DISCOVERY—THE ROAD-AGENTS AT HOME.

DENVER DOLL may or may not have approved of taking the Sport to Crystal Carrol's; at any rate, she did not join the little procession that bore him there.

Instead, she gave the two weapons a close examination, after which she set out for the boarding-house, where she had previously put up.

Going up one flight of stairs, she followed a long hall to the rear of the building, and finally entered an apartment of considerable size, where three men were seated around a table engaged in a social game of eucher.

They paused and looked up, as the Detective Queen entered, however, and by the reflection of the candle-light upon their faces we recognize three former acquaintances in the persons of Walt Christie, Chug, the Chinaman, and Yakie Strauss.

There was a look of expectancy upon their faces, as they beheld the young woman, in whose faithful service they had been for several years.

"Vel, vot der news is?" Yakie asked, pushing forward a vacant chair, with his foot.

"I think we have not lost by coming here again!" the girl replied, seating herself. "McParland attacked the stage I came in on to-night, not far from this camp. He had twenty or more men."

"Shimminy shumpers! you don'd vas say so! Did he make much of a haul?"

"Yes; cleaned out the crowd and the treasure-box, and took off the mail-bags. We must once more lay our traps for him, but you have got to lay shady, in disguise. It don't matter so much about me, as I can look out for number one, you bet! There's another lay-out, too, that I hardly expected to find."

"Not—der shild?"

"No! but the murderer of the child's mother. Walt, let me see that locket once more?"

"Lor' yes, honey, but don't you gone for to lose it, for I wouldn't take de worl' fo' dat locket, w'at I foun' roun' dat infant's neck."

Walt took from around his neck a slender gold chain with a magnificent locket attached to it, which was almost literally incrusted with diamonds.

This chain had been found around the neck of the child whom Walt had rescued on the mountain-side, a year before—and since which time little Grace, as they had named her, had been mysteriously abducted from their keeping.

Opening the locket in two sections, three pictures were revealed.

The middle one was a correct likeness of little Grace, the left side contained a lifelike picture of the murdered woman Walt had seen in the mountains, as she had appeared in life, while the right-hand likeness was of a dashing young man, singularly like the wounded sport, who had given his name as Yankee.

"Yes, yes—there can be no disputing that fact," Denver Doll murmured. "Yankee and this man are one and the same, and he should know of the child, and the crime on that wild snowy night, one year ago. By the way, when I come to think of it, that woman who keeps the cigar store is the living image of this woman in the picture, although she appears much younger. Humph! there's a mystery about this case that needs solving, and the more you tackle it the deeper it grows. Yet, I've faith I can unravel it. Walt, let me inspect that box once more."

The box was apparently solid, yet its light weight proclaimed that it had a cavity within—but the question was how to reach it without spoiling the box, for there was no lid, or visible way of opening it.

"I still believe that this box contains some important secret in regard to this matter of the child," Doll said, thoughtfully, "and it looks to me as if it was our duty to open it, and find out what we can."

"Yaw, dot vas how vas der matter. Smash der box—but maype der vas dynamite in it," Yakie suggested.

"Let her go, den, fo' suah—but put de box under dat yar rat-wrustler!" said Walt, to whom Chug was an eye-sore.

"'Melican no muchee smartee," Chug said, with a contemptuous shrug. "Let Chineeman hab box—mebbe open 'im."

"I dare say," Doll remarked, sarcastically, as she handed him the box.

Chug turned it over and over and examined it closely for several minutes—then, taking a

knife from his belt, he scraped away at the edges of the box, industriously. There was evidently more silver than alloy in the composition for the metal scaled off quite readily, until suddenly there was a sharp click, and the lid of the box flew open.

The plating had been done around the edges after the box was closed, thereby making it appear solid.

"Well done!" exclaimed Doll. "You're more cute than I gave you credit for being, Chug. Let me see the box."

She received it, and took therefrom a closely folded document, covered with writing in a slightly cramped hand.

Spreading it out on the table, she read the contents aloud, but in a low tone, just audible to her companions.

It was as follows:

"SACRAMENTO, CAL., July 10, 1878.

"*To Whom It May Concern:*—

"I, Gabriel Porter, being of declining health but sound in mind and realizing that I am nearing the end of my earthly career do hereby make my last will and testament, for the disposal of all my property, both real and personal, with and subject to the following explanations:

"My earthly kin at the following date, so far as concern the laws of inheritance, are as follows: I have one daughter living, who is married to a young man by the name of Charles Eisler, my daughter's maiden name having been Dora Porter. From their union has sprung a child, whose name is Ethel Eisler.

"In addition to the above, I have living a brother-in-law, named Valentine Verner, and a niece, his child by union with my sister, since deceased, whose name is Isabel.

"Not having favored the childish union of my child with Eisler, I cannot conscientiously make her my heir direct.

"But, agreeable to the stipulations hereinafter mentioned, I do make my daughter's daughter, Ethel Eisler, my sole and only heir to all my wealth, real and personal, without exception—the stipulation being that said Ethel Eisler shall be living and enjoying good health, and in the custody and charge of one or more of her parents, on the 20th day of November, A. D. 1880, at which period the executors and administrators hereinafter appointed by me, shall have all my property converted into money—and put out on interest, secured by bond and mortgage the interest payable to the natural guardian of the child for her support, and after her majority, to be placed at her command.

"But, providing said Ethel Eisler be not living, on the day and date above mentioned, or shall die upon that date, by any cause, all my bequest as above mentioned, shall revert to Isabel Verner, without exception.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF I hereunto do set my hand and seal, on the day and date first above written.

"GABRIEL PORTER."

Then followed the names of the gentlemen named as executor and administrator, which need not be mentioned here.

Denver Doll folded the document and returned it to the box.

"That settles *that*," she said. "We are on the trail at last, and a part of the mystery is solved in the beginning. But there will be more to be encountered before we get through. It is plain now why Yankee and Verner are enemies. And it is also quite interesting to know where the child is and who murdered her mother. This man Eisler may be a consummate rascal too. Then who was it shot him? Humph! there's a number of points left in the compass yet, pards; so get your thinkers together. And you, Walt, take this box and paper, and see that you do not lose it, under penalty of your life, for the will may never have been probated, as the law calls it."

When the wee sma' hours of that night were passing, and there were but few lights gleaming from the windows of the shanties of Shining Bar, a man, enveloped in a dark cloak, with a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, approached Sullinder's grocery from the rear and tapped upon the back door.

After a short pause he imitated the chirp of a cricket, then the door was opened and he entered, closing it after him.

At first all was as dark as the shades of Egypt within the room, but gradually the light of a bull's-eye lantern was turned on at one side of the room, and revealed all objects with sharp distinctness.

The apartment was used for postal purposes, and was really a part of the grocery store, the pigeon-holed partition across the room only running half-way up to the ceiling.

Between the postal-boxes and the rear wall was a large space, however, furnished with stools, and a long table used for distributing purposes.

Upon the stools around this table were seated half a dozen men, exclusive of the one who had turned on the "glim."

They all wore cloaks similar to that of the new-comer, and also black vails over their faces.

There were bottles and glasses upon the table, and also a number of letters, as yet unopened.

The new-comer was a man of fine figure, dressed in gray beneath his cloak, with top-boots upon his feet, a well-equipped weapon-belt round his waist, and when his slouch hat was raised, a full, attractive face, with sweeping mustache, black eyes and hair to match, was revealed.

"The captain!" broke in low tones from several; and this was introductory of the famous road-rider, McParland.

"'Sh! Is all well?" he demanded, in a cool, business-like tone.

"All's well!" one of the men replied. "The shutters is up, and curtains down, hours ago. But I'm risking all by allowing the meetings here!"

McParland laughed.

"One can afford to risk much, when he gets a finger in fortune hauls, every few nights Where's the secretary?"

"He hasn't turned up. Heard he was sick."

"Bah! I don't believe it. Still we can get along without him. How has the inspection and reconnoissance turned out, that I ordered?"

"Excellent, captain. Wells-Fargo's office has upward of three thousand on the next stage trip."

"Good. But it must be secured from the office here. There's a military company reported moving through the hills, in this direction—so it will be advisable to let the trail cool off for awhile. Kelly, I appoint you and Sullinder, Jarvis and Morris to make the tap at Fargo's.

You have all things ready I believe. I will get back to the hills, and there will be another meeting here to-morrow night, after the Post-office closes."

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK-BEARDED MAN.

THE next morning Shining Bar's agent for Wells-Fargo Company awoke to the most unwelcome fact that the office had been entered during the night, the safe unlocked, and all of its valuable contents taken.

When the news got abroad, the camp was once more thrown into a great state of commotion, and citizen Markward,(who by the way was a heavy loser by the robbery) together with Burke, the chief of the Vigilantes, and several other influential men of Shining Bar, by agreement called upon Denver Doll, at the Occidental boarding-house.

They were shown into the parlor, where they were shortly joined by the young Detective Queen, who was looking remarkably fresh and pretty after a night's rest.

She had met Burke before, and by him was introduced to the other members of the party, after which she was informed of the safe-robbery.

"And now we have come," said Markward, "to see if we cannot enlist you to put an end to this series of depredations, and bring this McParland and his band to justice. We have heard that you are by profession a detective, literally a detective on the track of the road-agent chief."

"Perhaps I am, but I may have private reasons for this. One is not apt to spend much valuable time, unrewarded, in hunting down a desperado, unless he or she has some private object in view. I am sorry to hear of these depredations, as it places this section of the country in a feverish state of excitement, and keeps many good people away. Perhaps a reward would tempt some daring spirit to hunt this road-agent to his lair."

"There are several rewards offered by private parties, already."

"Yes, and still, without meaning offense, these same parties, or at least some of them, may be greatly assured in offering the rewards."

The significance in her tone conveyed the meaning pretty plainly, even if the words did not.

"You mean to say that if they had to pay these offered rewards, they would not eventually be anything out of pocket?"

"Well, yes—that is, I've dreamed that such things might easily be worked, in cases like this."

"I myself have sometimes cherished an idea that McParland has associates in this town."

"I have no doubt of it, and possibly might, after a study, suspicion some one, were a quiet thousand dollars to back the event of my capture of one of the ringleaders!"

"That can be arranged right here among us," Markward announced. "We are all men of responsibility, and will pledge you the amount for the capture of one of the ringleaders. After that we will bargain with you further."

"Very well; it's a bargain. I will go to work quietly, and you must all do the same, so far as furnishing me any needed assistance. If I cannot accomplish anything by the 20th of November, I will give it up as a bad job."

"Ah! what peculiarity has that day?"

"It may have several, you know—it may have none! But, so-long!" and bowing, she walked away, leaving the gentlemen to depart with a feeling that women are always the "weaker sex."

Yankee, after being removed to Crystal Carrol's after the duel, had his wound dressed, and felt a little better, though by no means what could be called frisky.

The bullet had passed not far from a vital spot, and on being extracted proved to be one of such as are used in 32-caliber sporting rifles.

Crystal bustled about and waited on him with alacrity, prepared him some stimulant, and then a piece of toast, all the time chatting in her own artless manner, until he finally nearly forgot his wound, and dropped asleep.

He did not awaken until late the next morning, when, on opening his eyes, he beheld his hostess behind the counter, engaged in waiting upon a customer—a burly, black-haired and bewhiskered chap.

"Ah! you have had quite a sleep for a sick man," Crystal said, smiling over at him. "How are you feeling?"

"Pretty well, thanks to the efforts of my admirable nurse!" Yankee replied. "I reckon I can navigate once more."

"Don't try to exert yourself, please. I will get you some breakfast in a moment."

"You seem mighty anxious to retain your patient," the man at the bar growled, in a low, hoarse tone, but as low as were the words, Yankee overheard them.

"What's this?" flashed through his mind. "The gent of black aspect speaks rather familiarly, it seems to me, for a customer."

Crystal did not look toward the Sport, but giving the black-beard a scowling look, went behind the counter into the cigar room in front, the customer following her example *via* the slat door.

Then, for several minutes, Yankee heard a low and at times sullen murmur of voices, but could not distinguish what was said, though he concluded the interview was not exactly harmonious.

"I wonder if that is the lover of my fair hostess?' he mused. "If so, she has a very poor choice, barring that he is not in disguise, which I should not be surprised if he was. Humph! strange things in this life. Although now satisfied that I am wrong, I cannot shake off the likeness of this woman to my lost Dora. I could almost love her for the resemblance. But, no; I've no time to love now, except for my lost ones, and to pursue the bitter trail of vengeance!"

His reverie was brought to a close for a time by the entrance of Crystal, the black-bearded gent having taken his departure.

"Oh! have I kept you waiting long?" she apologized: "these rough customers are such bores,

sometimes, you know. I will have you something to eat soon."

"I am so aware from encounters with several of the species!" Yankee replied.

He then arose, and with an effort found that he could walk slowly about the room.

"Oh! I'll be all right, soon!" he declared.

"Have you no idea who could have shot you, sir?" Crystal asked.

"Not in the least, as I had noticed every face present within bullet range of the dueling-ground, before the circus began. I wonder how Verner the Valiant is feeling? Rather *spicy*, I dare say."

The breakfast of venison, toast and coffee was soon ready, and Yankee partook of it heartily, after which he slipped a twenty-dollar gold-piece into Crystal's hand, and took his hat.

"There's a partial recompense for your services to me!" he said, "together with my heartfelt thanks, and if I can ever be of any service to you, pray do not hesitate to command me."

"Oh, sir! I could not think of accepting pay for so slight a favor. Please take your money back!"

"By no means. Keep it. Some time I might be your enemy, but never as long as you keep *that!*" he said, with strange intensity.

"How do you mean?" she asked, looking up at him, with a faint blush upon her cheeks.

"Oh! it's a story of a lost love and a wrecked life, which I would not like to relate, as nothing but pain and regret can accompany the narration. You are the living image of one who is lost to me, I suppose, forever. But, good-day! I will stir about, and hunt me up a boarding-place."

He then took his departure, but by the time he had reached the "Monaco" he was obliged to go in, and sit down awhile.

Just as he was about to leave, Denver Doll entered, and saw and approached him.

"I am glad to see you around so quick, but am afraid you are a little too hasty," she said. "I trust you believe I was not instrumental in causing your wound, Mr. Eisler?"

"I must believe you are not, as I doubt if a thirty-two caliber bullet imbedded in a shot-gun wad, could hardly have hit so correctly, as Verner's weapon was leveled at my heart."

"I am of the opinion that some enemy took the chance to get in his work on you, when there was so good an opportunity."

"Enemies, eh? I shall first have to look around and see if I have any!"

"I can assure you that you have one at least—and cannot one hire others?"

"You refer to Verner?"

"Yes!"

"How—that is, what do *you* know of his enmity toward me?"

"As much as yourself, perhaps."

"But how—what?"

"Oh! well, if it will satisfy you, I might remark that it is getting close enough to the 20th of November to cause Mr. Verner some bright anticipations—or rather his daughter."

Yankee started, violently.

"Where did you get hold of this thing?"

"Oh! accidentally, of course. Detectives are supposed to know all things."

Yankee did not reply, but sat staring at the floor, an unnatural light in his eyes.

Denver Doll noticed it, and remarked:

"Perhaps I should not tell you, under the present circumstances, but I will. She was found that cold November night about one year ago!"

CHAPTER VI.

YANKEE ON THE WAR-PATH.

YANKEE started more violently than before at this.

"She! she!—whom do you mean? For God's sake speak!"

"Your wife, where you left her cold and stiff in death—murdered, mind you—with her little child freezing beside her."

"What! *You* tell me this with the insinuation that I did the job!" he cried, fiercely. "Have a care how you accuse me!"

"Well, the crime has to be shouldered by some one, and we do not at present know any one else to suspect!"

"But the child! the child!"

"Was brought to my camp and I adopted it. It was afterward kidnapped from me, since when I have never been able to find any trace of it."

"Oh! God! This news is worse than the suspense I have been bearing, for I have been trying to believe them both dead. God knows I could never have done them any harm whom I loved so! Did you bury my wife?"

"No. She was discovered by one of my men. The child and what clews could be found, were first brought to this very camp, then, our camp. When we returned for the body, no trace of it could be found."

Yankee's face was buried in his hands, and a tremor shook his figure.

Deepest grief seemed his, which, for the time being forbade speech.

Finally, however, he said:

"It is a blow I have undergone, which would kill any ordinary man. Still, I must brace up and take comfort in the thought of revenge. For revenge I will have on the one who broke up my home, if it is the last act of my life. Do you know who that man was? Here! I will tell you"—and he spoke the name in a low tone.

Denver Doll looked her surprise.

"Will you tell me the circumstances of the case?" she asked.

"No! not now. I am not sufficiently nerved to bear up under the rehearsal at present. Some other time will do. I must recover my child before the 20th of the month, or the Verners will triumph. Have you Gabriel Porter's will?"

"At my command."

"It is well, for there is no verbatim copy of it, and it is not recorded—that is, I do not think it is. However, the Verners know the purport of the will. Now, you are in possession of so many facts of the case, I want you to help me through with it, and you can command your price."

Denver Doll gazed at him a moment, reflectively, as if reading his nature, his secrets, his very being, before giving her answer.

"I take but precious little stock in men!" she

said, finally, and her tone was proof that she meant what she said. "Still, for the sake of the dear little child, to whom I became greatly attached—for *her* sake, I will endeavor to do all in my power for you. You must look out sharp for yourself. If you don't the first you know you won't know nothing. You have seen Miss Crystal Carrol?"

"Yes. She bears a most striking resemblance to my lost wife."

"Might she not be Dora?"

"No, I fear not. She is more vivacious and lively, and all I said to her in regard to my trouble did not seem to affect her."

"Oh! well, resemblances are often encountered. You keep quiet now and get well, and I will see what I can do for you."

Valentine Verner had not escaped the volley of salt and pepper. His breast, neck and face were full of it, and for hours he was in most acute agony.

The evening following Denver Doll's interview with Yankee, the Verners sat in their comfortable parlor, Mr. Verner being engaged in writing at the desk in one corner. Miss Isabel, a stately brunette of four-and-twenty, sat in a luxurious rocker, in front of the fireplace, her slippered feet upon the fender, and the fire-light shining upon her face. It was not exactly a handsome face, but what might be termed a coldly pretty face. The eyes and hair were jetty black, the first possessed of a power to warm up wondrously when anything pleased her.

She was evidently a woman who could love intensely, or hate rancorously.

She was engaged in knitting some piece of fancy work, and ever and anon glanced toward her wounded parent.

At last he laid aside his pen.

"All the papers are made out," he said, speaking more to himself than to her. "To-morrow I will sell and receive the cash for all my real estate here, ready to go back to Sacramento. The twentieth is growing nearer and nearer."

"And no tidings of Dora nor the child?" Isabel said, inquiringly.

"None, since she left Eisler, and fled to parts unknown. Eisler is here, and for a purpose. A certain enemy of his is also in the vicinity. I fancy he suspects that this enemy has the child in his possession."

"You mean McParland?"

"Exactly."

"Pshaw! I do not believe it!"

"What cause have *you* to form any opinion on the subject whatever, pray?"

"Oh! none, perhaps!" Isabel replied, languidly.

"But, on the contrary, perhaps you have!" Verner retorted, sharply. "See here, Isabel, you know better than to try to deceive me. For some time past you have had a caller. I have never before interested myself enough to ask who, trusting you were capable of looking out for yourself. But, a few nights since I saw a suspicious character in a mask and cloak leave the house, as I was approaching it. Could you accommodate me with his name?"

Fire leaped into the daughter's black eyes.

"I dare say I could if I chose," she answered. "I don't, however, consider it necessary for a parent to be too inquisitive, where his bosom friends are concerned!"

Verner, with an effort, smothered an oath.

"What in Heaven's name do you mean?" he demanded, leaping to his feet.

"I mean," Isabel said, "that I have a lover, or, rather, have been quietly receiving the attentions of a man, who professes to adore me. This man is an intimate pal of yours. Is it necessary that I should mention any names?"

"No! no! not at all! not at all!" the parent protested hastily. "But this thing must be stopped."

"Ha! ha!" Isabel laughed. "I am not particular. Since Yankee has come here, I am easily appeased."

"Mention not that ruffian to me, in connection with yourself. I'll disown you if you notice him!"

"Oh! well, if the subject is too *spicy* for you, drop it!" was the stinging retort.

Just then there came a rap at the door.

"A caller on business; you may retire," Verner said, motioning her to a rear room.

"It is hardly necessary!" she replied, significantly; "still I will obey."

And she vanished.

Verner then opened the door, and admitted the visitor, who was the same black-haired and bewhiskered individual who had earlier in the day been at Crystal Carroll's store.

He nodded familiarly and took a seat.

Verner also became seated.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"Well!" the other replied, "why were you not around to see me?"

"I was sick," the speculator growled. "Look at me!"

The man grinned: "You *are* a pet for beauty now," he said. "Why didn't you finish the job for your antagonist?"

"It was not I that fired the shot—that is why. What is your errand here to-night?"

"I came on two errands, or more properly one, as both are connected. Are you prepared to be surprised?"

"Oh! likely I can stand the shock."

"You ought to," the other returned. "To my own knowledge you are hardened enough to withstand a cannon-ball. Well, to be out with it—I am in love!"

Verner yawned, but did not reply.

"Yes, I am in love!" the caller went on, "tho' it may appear strange. The object of my adoration—"

"Is locked in the next room, of her own choice, to save enduring the agony of a meeting with you," the speculator interrupted, maliciously.

The man of the black beard winced, then seemed to grow furious.

"Valentine Verner!" he cried, sternly.

"John McParland!" the other returned, coolly.

The road-agent fairly trembled when his name was uttered.

"'Sh! curse you," he gritted. "Do you not know that walls sometimes have ears? Enough

of this nonsense. Let it be no secret that I love your daughter, and have decided to make her my wife. You, as a matter of course, will consent, and that will settle the whole business, without any parley."

"As a matter of course you are a confirmed idiot to think of such a thing. My daughter marry you—you, an outlaw, a road-agent and rascal. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! if you like. True, I am an outlaw in the eyes of the public—a man given to the delectable practice of stopping stages and relieving plethoric purses; but, you are no better than I, for you are one of the chisels of which I am the mallet. Your daughter I adore, and have sworn to have her."

"And I swear you shall not. She is already engaged to the man of her choice—the same individual who salivated me with salt and pepper."

The scheming speculator watched closely for some visible effect of this speech, but saw none.

McParland was not nibbling at such bait, so to speak. He calmly lit a cigar, and then said:

"You speak hastily, without considering the man you are addressing, nor your own interests. My reputation ought to assure you that I am the wrong customer to trifle with. Besides, the 20th of November is but a few days off."

Verner leaped to his feet with a cry.

"As I suspected. You have the child."

McParland tipped back in his chair with a grim smile.

"Well, you're about right," he responded.

"And you purpose to use this child as a means of forcing a marriage with my daughter?"

"Perhaps."

"What if I refuse?"

"That matters not. She is her own master."

"But she will refuse."

"Let her. The child is salable."

"Curse you! What do you want?"

"I'll tell you: First of all, I want all your wealth, and your daughter as my wife. The child will then never come to light. When your daughter comes into her fortune, she will take care of you, and all will go as merry as a marriage bell."

"Wouldn't that be nice, though? But I am not in the game. Parents poor, who depend on rich daughters, never cultivate the gout."

McParland arose, and carefully readjusted his disguise.

"Well, I'll give you a chance to consider," he remarked. "It's plain to me whom I shall sell the kid to, if I can't earn a wife out of the bargain."

And with these words he abruptly left the house.

As soon as he had gone Verner arose, and suddenly opened the door of the adjoining room, to find, as he had expected, Isabel just rising from a crouching position, where she had been listening.

"So you have been playing eavesdropper, eh?" he hissed, savagely.

"I am sure I might listen to the voice of my lover!" she retorted.

"Curse your lover!" he roared. "You think by coming to his terms you can win. We shall see. I am your parent—your friend. If you leave me, I'll put you in the way for a coffin, before you see a cent of the Porter inheritance!"

And foaming with rage, he turned and quitted the house, slamming the door after him.

Isabel stood in the center of the room, her figure drawn to its fullest hight, her face white, her eyes warmed up with an unnatural fire.

"I am to be the chooser, eh?" came from between her teeth, in a sibilant whisper—"it's father or husband, eh? Well! I will consider, but I rather think the coffin is not made that will hold me. If I have to play for the game, why should I play to lose?"

"'Ther crockydile he swallered a ham,
He swallered a ham;
He swallered a ham;
Then got sucked in by a Natchez clam,
One cold stormy morning."

"Owl omelets an' fricasseed frogs, thet's no sarcumstance, pilgrim! Reporter did ye say? Lor' bless ye—I kin squat down on ther bulge eend uv a bullwhip, an' tell ye ernuff in a minnit, ter confuse ye fer a year! Pap is my name—Old Mount. I'm a snorter, I am—a reg'lar amalgamated double-action, steel-hardened, fine-tooth terror from Taos."

"But, my dear sir, allow me to get in a single word. I am Jones—Chawles Pygmallion Jones of the *Cavortin' Cyclone* o' Cheyenne. I come in quest of items—items, sir—not vernacular phrases. Do you know of any sensational tid-bits, as it war—has any man's wife broke his nose or *vice versa?* have any three-legged calves been born in the neighborhood? has any one talked about his neighbor, or committed suicide by swallerin' left-handed shot-guns, three-legged dictionaries, or the like? Sir, in the name of the *Cavortin' Cyclone*, I command you to impart to me the news, or I shall mutilate you. I am a bad man when my mercury is aroused!"

Pretty well lubricated with whisky, better known in Shining Bar as "life-preserver," and "sweet by-and-by," those two characteristic emblems of indigenous humanity, Jones and Mount, had entered the Monaco, arm in arm, and waltzed toward the bar, behind which the roseate poison-compounder, Emily, presided with austere grace, his infantile apology of a mustache waxed out to a point.

"Ahem! gud mornin'!" Pap said, stroking his beard, and glancing at the array of bottles on the shelf.

"Ahem! that is—Mr. Barkeeper, I'll make ye 'quaint' wi' ther reporter o' ther *Cavortin' Cyclone*, o' Shian, and we are werry dry—that is, cussed dry. Heer's to us young fellers! so set forth ther bottle o' 'by-an'-by,' and we will indulge in a little expression o' good humor."

The darling dispenser gazed at his two would-be customers with stupendous hauteur, and rapped upon the counter with his knuckles, as much as to say, "Come down!"

Pap felt in his pockets, looked at Jones and sighed.

Jones felt in his pocket, looked at Pap and sighed; then both sighed in chorus, and arm-in-arm walked out of the saloon.

Outside Pap took an empty flask from his pocket and filled it with water.

"Now I'm jest goin' ter play magic, like when by er double-j'inted incantation I transformed ther mouth uv a Chinaman inter an eight-day canal. When I git ther galoot ter chase me yeou slip behind ther bar an' grab all ye kin carry an' run. We'll divvy outside."

Into the Monaco went the festive pair, and up to the bar.

Pap held up his empty hands and made several queer motions, when like a flash a bottle, apparently filled with liquor, appeared in his grasp.

Believing it one of his own flasks, and seeing Pap turn and run, the barkeeper uttered a howl of rage, leaped over the bar and gave chase.

As he leaped over in one direction, Charles Pygmalion Jones leaped over in the opposite, and instead of landing upon the floor went through an open trap door rub-a-dub-dub-dub down a pair of stairs into the cellar.

Fearing to go above again, he looked about for some place of concealment.

Espying what he supposed was an empty barrel, he leaped into it and—went down, down, down into utter darkness—down into the disused shaft of a mine, far into the depths of the earth!

Feeling worn out and weak by the time night arrived, Yankee had retired early to his room in the boarding-house.

It was a rather small apartment, at the rear end of the building, and furnished with a narrow bed, a stand and a chair.

One window, without a curtain, shutters or fastenings, looked out into the rear yard, from which any one could easily ascend to and raise the sash.

"Not a very savory berth for a man who don't know when he is liable to get popped over," he muttered, looking out of the window. "If I am not greatly mistaken, I shall have visitors tonight—at least I have a kind of foreboding to that effect. So I will take care not to be caught napping."

Together with his coat and some other clothes he manufactured a dummy and covered it over in bed so as to represent a man sleeping there; then he crept under the bed, where he could not be seen, and, armed with his revolvers, waited.

It was a long wait, but his patience was not easily tired. A clock in another part of the house struck one, and all seemed quiet in the vicinity.

Still another hour passed, and then he heard footsteps in the hall outside, followed by a cautious tap on the door.

After a moment the same cautious tap, tap was repeated; then followed a silence of nearly half an hour.

"That was only a ruse to see if I was awake,' he concluded. "I can reasonably look out for a visit from the window now."

From where he lay under the bed he had an unobstructed view of the window without being in danger of being seen himself.

He was right about the attack in that direction. It was not long ere he heard a noise on the outside of the house, as if a ladder were being placed against it, and a moment later, the head and shoulders of a person was discernible outside the window. It was a man whose face was masked, and whose head wore a broad-brim hat.

Cautiously he raised the window, and then silently crept into the room.

Yankee perceived that he clutched a murderous-looking knife in his hand.

"Humph! if he murders the dummy without discovering the joke, I'll follow him, see where he goes to, and who he is," he muttered.

With bated breath the would-be murderer approached the bedside—then came three quick, heavy blows, and the assassin retreated toward the window.

"Ha! ha! he'll never interfere with any of my plans again, I'll warrant!" the Sport heard him say as he clambered down the ladder.

From under the bed then came the Sport, and he was out and down the ladder but a few minutes after the assassin, who was making leisurely off for the outskirts of the camp, up the gulch.

Like a sleuth-hound Yankee followed him, taking care to keep as much out of sight as possible.

For perhaps ten minutes this flight and pursuit continued, when the Sport saw the assassin enter a clump of chaparral.

Cautiously approaching it, he heard human voices, and soon saw two figures standing in a little opening into which the moonlight streamed.

One was the masked man—the other was none other than the cigar store beauty, Crystal Carrol!

"Well, are you here at last?" the masked man demanded, in a tone that was anything but lover-like.

"As you see," Crystal replied, spiritedly. "Pray where have you been?"

"Looking after *you*."

"Well, you will know where to find me after this. There shall be no more clandestine meetings. I have about come to the conclusion, Ralph, that you had better pay your attentions to some one else, as I do not think I care particularly for you."

"You don't, eh?" His tone was savage. "You've changed your national choice to a *Yankee*, have you?"

"Possibly. He is at least a gentleman."

"Undoubtedly. I hear from Miss Verner that he once had a wife, who was the image of you, whom he beat, and who was otherwise abused by him, until, to save the life of herself and her child, she fled. This is the *roue* you would forsake me for, is it—me, a titled nobleman?"

"I hardly believe you are what you claim, Ralph. Besides, I have great faith that Mr. Yankee is all a woman could desire."

"Well, then know, Miss Crystal Carrol, that Yankee, as you call him, has been murdered in his bed. I just heard so as I came from the town!"

"You lie!"

It was Yankee who said this, as he sprung from covert, revolvers in hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSPIRACY—DENVER DOLL ON TRAIL—THE REPORTER IN A BAD BOX.

HAD a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of Crystal and her lover, neither could have been more surprised than at the sudden appearance of Yankee, the Sport, who made his introductory bow upon that dramatic scene, coatless, hatless, and bootless.

"You lie!" Yankee cried again, leveling his revolvers upon the masked man. "You did not murder me, my fine fellow, as you supposed; but, instead, you stabbed a dummy I had prepared for you in bed!"

Crystal screamed.

"Did this man try to murder you?" she demanded, shrinking toward Yankee.

"As you have heard. He entered my room, but got his work in on my coat and some bedclothes, while I was under the bed. Who are you, my noble desperado? What is your name, I say?"

The man stood in grim silence. He would not answer, but was evidently looking for a chance to escape.

Yankee comprehended his motive, and nodded his head with a grim smile.

"Just you try it!" he said. "I'll fix you over into a perforated plaster if you do. Miss Carrol, who is this man?"

"Oh, please do not harm him!"

"That is not answering my question."

"No—but—but please do not hurt him. His name is Sir Ralph Raphael, a gentleman from Europe."

"Bah! *Sir* Ralph fiddle-sticks! Has he been stuffing your head up with this? I can tell you who he is, without seeing his face. He is John McParland, the road-agent!"

Crystal gasped.

Her lover gave vent to a fearful oath.

"'Tis false!" he gritted, trying to sneak his hand toward his belt.

"'Tis true!" Yankee cried. "Remember my caution. I have met you at last, and before we part we shall have a settlement. Where is my wife and child, John McParland? Speak before I murder you!"

Fiercely spoke the handsome Sport, and it was evident that he meant, with intense earnestness, every word he said.

McParland evidently saw that there was no use for him to resist—just at present, anyhow—for he removed his mask with a growl, and his darkly-handsome face was exposed to view in the moonlight.

"How should I know about your wife?" he growled, twisting his mustache. "I am not a stock-jobber in other men's wives."

"You know where you murdered her, you accursed hound! Tell me, then, where she is buried?"

"I know not where you will find her, if so be it that she is dead. I did not kill her."

Click!

One of Yankee's weapons came to full cock in an instant.

"Chaw back that lie! One—two—"

"Let up!" McParland interrupted. "Rather than get split on a bullet I'll acknowledge anything. I did not kill your wife, but know the man that struck the blow. She was wandering, half-demented, through the mountains. I knew this person was on her trail, and I set out to baffle his purpose. I failed. I came upon her body, but the child was gone. I bore the body to a cavern, and then laid it away, where no wild beasts could get at it. Some time afterward I recovered the child, and have it still in my possession. I am a bad man, Yankee Eisler, but I never killed the woman you won from me for your wife—nor any other woman. I am not a woman-slayer."

The Sport listened with unvarying expression of countenance.

"If you did not kill her, who did?" he demanded, sternly.

"Valentine Verner!" McParland replied, with a strange chuckle.

"But did you capture the child from Verner?"

"Certainly; and he has since offered to give me his daughter in exchange for the child."

"You are a chronic liar!" Yankee retorted, savagely.

"Whoever secured the child, secured it from the camp of Denver Doll and her detectives. That shows conclusively that Verner did not have her, which he likely would, if he had murdered my wife. So, further denial of the crime is utterly useless. You swore to break up my happy home, and you succeeded. You swore you would be revenged upon me through those I held dearest, and you did so. John McParland, I have made up my mind to kill you. So say your prayers, if you desire, as you shall have but five minutes' respite!"

McParland laughed recklessly.

"Any harm that comes to me effectually settles the fate of Ethel Eisler!" he chuckled, villainously. "When I die, those who hold the child in their power have pledged themselves to kill the child!"

"Say what you like. I have sworn to have revenge, and I will not be balked. You have two more minutes. On your knees and pray, you dog. *One!*"

McParland stood immovable, defiance expressed upon his face, and in his gleaming eyes.

Near to Yankee stood Crystal Carrol, white with terror, and trembling at what seemed impending death to the mountain road-rider.

"*Two!*" Yankee said, sternly. There was no pity in his tone—he was as relentless as ever fate could be.

Still with bulldog defiance stood the road-agent, not a tremor of fear seeming to affect him, although death stared him in the face.

Yankee's keen eye noticed this, and a feeling of admiration struggled into his heart.

The Sport's pistol-hand raised a trifle higher, and his lips were about to move to speak the fatal "three."

With a cry Crystal Carrol sprung forward and threw her arms about Yankee, thus knocking aside his aim.

"Oh! don't hurt him, Yankee Eisler—for my sake don't fire—for the sake of me, who loves you! Oh! pray don't shoot!" she screamed, frantically, and she clung to him so persistently that he could not use his pistol-arm.

McParland was not the man to stand on ceremony, when he saw an advantage to improve,

and seeing that Yankee was momentarily powerless to act, he turned and ran like a deer.

Before Eisler could disengage herself, the King of the Road was at a safe distance from sight or hearing.

Yankee finally put Miss Carroll off, and stood with a baffled expression gazing in the direction the outlaw had gone.

Then he turned his gleaming eyes upon Crystal!

"You have succeeded well in freeing the man whose life it is my aim to take. Perhaps your lover can thank you for it—I cannot!" he said, bitterly.

"I am not so fortunate as to have a lover, and what I did was simply to save you from doing murder!" she replied, calmly. "Come! go back to Shining Bar, and thank me that your hand is not stained with human blood."

He uttered a sort of hollow, unearthly laugh at her earnestness.

"Maybe you are right," he said. "We will go back before we are discovered. I feel somewhat exhausted!"

She took his arm, and as they walked leisurely back toward the town she found that he had spoken the truth. He was really weaker than he would admit, and it was only his nerve-power that kept him up until he reached the boarding-house, where, after bidding Crystal good-by, he slowly ascended the ladder to his room. And he had no sooner gained his bed than his senses took leave of him.

'Twere necessary that a couple of days of comparative quiet should ensue, in Shining Bar, in order to give the excitable inhabitants thereof time to wear off the effects of the several stirring events that had occurred.

The miners settled down to work, the gamblers plied their vocation with less profit and the main street presented a scene of less bustle than before.

Denver Doll was occasionally seen about town, but her actions were not such as to arouse suspicion that she was in any way trying her hand at her business.

Yankee had got out again, and Valentine Verner was seen on the street and about the mines, which he now only controlled as manager, having sold out his interests.

But even when in lack of a stirring sensation, Shining Bar was destined to have something to attract attention and comment.

This something was embodied in the person of a Mlle. Zoe, who had arrived on the stage, baggage and all, and had hired a marquee put up on a vacant space near the Monaco, and then hung out a banner, bearing the following:

MLLE. ZOE,

FORTUNE-TELLER AND SECOND-SIGHT SEER.

The Past, Present and Future Revealed, or Money Refunded.

Here was a novelty that Shining Bar had never had cause to wonder at before, and naturally a ripple of curiosity was aroused.

What the mademoiselle looked like no one knew, because she dressed in deepest black, and her face was ever hidden back of a heavy vail. She was seldom seen on the street, except going to and from her boarding-house to the marquee.

A couple of miners had ventured their half-eagle for an interview, and came out telling of the wonderful things Mlle. Zoe had done, in the way of imparting information of the past, present and future.

Yankee stood upon the steps of the Monaco, the third evening after McParland's escape, gazing at the marquee.

"I've half a notion to call on Mlle. Zoe," he muttered to himself, "just to see what she is like. Guess I will."

He walked slowly over toward the marquee, and pulling aside the curtain, entered, half angry at himself for doing so.

Within was but little that was attractive.

A sort of raised platform or dais had been arranged, and covered by a carpet. Its only furniture was a chair, upon which sat the black-clad figure of a woman, whose face was deeply vailed, and hands gloved.

She bowed as Yankee entered and approached her.

"What will ze gentleman have—his fortune told, or ze past, present and ze future revealed to him?" she asked, in a clear, winning tone.

"If you'll drop off the French and talk U. S. A., I'll have you attempt to explain my affairs," Yankee replied, in a bluff but good-natured way.

"I can talk pure American," Mlle. Zoe said, sweetly. "I think I can tell you much that will surprise you. You wish to know of the past?"

"Yes—you might as well grind out the whole grist, since it costs the same!" the Sport replied dryly.

"Well, you are a Californian?"

"You could have easily learned that."

"I do not depend except on myself for information. You have for some years led a wild life, gambling being one of your passions. You loved one girl—were beloved by two, but wedded the one of your choice, who also had another lover, to whom she was not entirely indifferent. Well, after marriage, you failed to break from your old habit of gambling, and in consequence you and your wife failed to agree and you grew jealous because she chatted now and then with her old lover, your rival. Things went along, until, in a fit of jealousy, you left home. When you returned, repentant, it was too late. Your wife had also gone, taking her child with her!"

"By Heaven, you are right!" Yankee cried, excitedly. "It was I who was to blame for all. But, woman, who are you who know so much of my history? Speak, for I will know!"

And he took a step forward, authoritatively.

But a revolver gleaming in her hand caused him to pause.

"I am Zoe, the fortune-teller; you came here to pay me for information, and I trust, act like a gentleman," she said, quietly. 'Shall I proceed?"

"Go ahead," Yankee responded, wincing.

"Well, to resume, this wife and child wandered into the mountains, and were pursued, and the wife was murdered by McParland, the

rival lover. The child was rescued, but afterward retaken, and is now in McParland's camp."

"You are an expert at your business," Yankee said, with sarcasm. "You are well versed in the case, but I already have learned all that your revelation discloses. Can't you give me something new?"

"I have not done, yet," Zoe replied, unruffled at his taunt. "Your present is one of great importance—more than was the past. A fortune is pending on your child. You want her—so do others, and each is ready to pay for her, and your enemy has the advantage by being on intimate terms with the child's captor. So that, although you may employ detectives, it is likely the 20th of November will pass without your seeing anything of your child—then, nor thereafter—unless you go at the matter in a different way. There is but one person who can get possession of Ethel Eisler, on short notice, and that person is myself!"

Yankee whistled.

"I thought you were working around to something of the kind!" he said. "You mountebanks are all frauds."

"Nevertheless, I will wager all my money that I can produce the child within a certain number of hours. My price is your hand in marriage. You are handsome, and I am by no means a fright. We would make an excellent worldly team, I fancy."

"Undoubtedly! But, child or no child, fortune or no fortune, I am not in the matrimonial market."

"Oh! Well, you have not had time to consider yet. After-thought may bring a change. Possibly I shall possess the child, and if I can do nothing better, can sell it to Verner. He is, I understand, very anxious to possess her, so that he can put it out of the way. My professional charges are five dollars."

"Dirt cheap!" Yankee said, as he tossed her a gold piece, and strode from the tent.

"Another schemer who has spotted the case, and is trying to make a stake!" he muttered, going toward the Post-office. "I'd give a deal to know who she is."

In passing Crystal Carrol's he dropped in, but a mulatto boy was tending to business, and the pretty proprietress was nowhere to be seen.

When the stage came rolling down into the town, it carried, for a wonder, but one passenger—a weazened, pinched-up little specimen of humanity, some fifty years of age, whose nose was of a ripe cherry color, and whose head was as bald as a full moon. The hooked cherry nose graced his visage, just above a large tobacco-stained mouth; his beard was of a week's growth, and the most striking sign of intelligence about him was a pair of little peering black eyes, sunken under a pair of shaggy overhanging eyebrows. In them was expressed a wily cunning, that belonged to one of his nature.

This individual, who on the journey had voluntarily introduced himself to Mickey Pryor as Monroe Miller, was greeted as soon as he left the stage, by Verner, with a hearty hand-shake, and the two walked away together toward the Monaco.

The eyes of Denver Doll, who was at the Post-office at the time, took in the matter, and a faint smile curved her pretty mouth.

"There is to be a meeting, to-night, and that man with a tinted nose will participate," she mused. "If I don't learn what this meeting is about, I hope I may never see daylight."

She watched Verner and his chum enter the Monaco; then she stepped briskly across the gulch to the boarding-house, and made her way to her room.

In fifteen minutes she emerged from the room transformed into a rough-shod miner—and one of the hardest-looking specimens of the miner's fraternity that one would be likely to meet in a long time.

Leaving a note under the door of the room occupied by her three comrades, she left the boarding-house, and made for the Monaco, where she presented herself at the bar, and ordered whisky.

"Where's yer rhino?" the astute Emily demanded, eying her sharply.

"Put her on ther slate!" was the reply. "I'm Glycerine George, from Poverty Claim, dead bu'sted, by thunder!"

"Then go make a raise!" was the advice. "Plenty o' suckers layin' 'round loose."

Glycerine George turned away with a sigh.

Near by stood Old Pap, looking nearly as forlorn as the delegate from Poverty Claim.

"See hyar, pilgrim, don't despair," he said, mournfully. "Don't despair, fer thar's a silver linin' ter every cloud they say. I haven't smiled fer a month—think o' that. My pard he tried to make a raise, but ther last I see'd o' him war his heels vanishin' over that air dispensin' counter.

"'Et's hard ter be broke, an go wi'out ile,
But et's hopeful o' change, when we rope in our pile.'"

Whether this logic affected the party from Poverty Claim, or not, is hard to say, but he zigzagged his way into a corner, immediately in the rear of where Verner and Miller were seated, and fell in a heap, as if "all seas over!"

"Who is the galoot?" Miller cried, in an undertone.

"Bah! Some drunken tough, dead drunk and dead broke, I reckon," Verner said, carelessly. "You say we can depend on half of the men at the camp, certain?"

"Yes. I have given the matter a careful canvas, and there's fully that many ready for mutiny. Two months have passed without a divy being declared, an' the boys are kind o' skeered."

"What of?"

"Well, there's a heap of Uncle Sam's men in the vicinity, which makes the situation look unpromising, in itself. Then, Mac has held off about the divy so long that some have an idea he intends turnin' traitor for sake o' savin' his own skin."

"I wouldn't be surprised. I've no confidence in him. But let us adjourn until the midnight meeting. I have notified all the safe men to be present."

"Very well. Describe the place of meeting, and I will be there," Miller said.

"The rear room of the Post-office. Tap three times on the back door and give the chirp of a cricket."

They then separated, Verner leaving the saloon and Miller moving to another part of it.

As soon as she deemed it safe, Denver Doll, in her disguise, arose and staggered out of the place, and was soon in her room at the boarding-house, where she exchanged disguises, and with paints, clothing and wigs soon transformed herself into a black-haired Spanish-looking person, with a sweeping mustache and dusky complexion.

Once she had been a passenger in a stage that had been attacked by McParland's men, and among them she had seen a man whom her present make-up almost exactly resembled.

A few minutes before twelve she left the building and took a circuitous route to the rear of the Post-office, in which vicinity she secreted herself and waited.

It was not long ere Valentine Verner put in an appearance, and was admitted to the rear room of the Post-office on giving three taps upon the door and the chirp of a cricket.

He was unmasked.

Soon another man came and was admitted, and so, one after another, until over a dozen had been admitted.

Last of all came the red-nosed delegate whom Verner had met at the stage, and was admitted after giving the signal.

"Now for it!" Doll muttered, leaving her place of concealment. "I'm going into that room if I bu'st a suspender."

Seeing that her weapons were in readiness, she advanced to the door and gave the signal.

Without delay the door was opened, and she stepped into the room, closing the door behind her.

All eyes were turned upon her, and Valentine Verner leaped hastily from his chair—for all were seated about the table.

"Hello! who the deuce are you?" he cried.

"Stop!" Miller interposed, arising; "it's Steward, one of McParland's men. What brings you here, Steward?"

"I was sent by the boys to tell you to go cautious, as they're rather suspicious that the captain smells a rat!" Doll replied.

"Let him suspect! I ordered the boys to spot him if he showed bad signs during my absence, and 'twas not necessary to send you. However, now that you are here, be seated, and we will go on with the meeting."

Denver Doll could scarcely repress a sigh of relief at the favorable turn matters had taken.

"Well, if I am to address this meeting," Verner said, "I request the undivided attention of all present—especially that of Messrs. Sullinder, Markward, Kelly, Arty, Mount, Hayes and Jarvis. Gentlemen, an important project is before us for consideration, which, if adopted, will undeniably put money equally in all of our pockets. You all well know that Shining Bar's mineral resources are not fully developed, and that there are bright promises for the future. Moreover, a hundred vigilant, well-trained men could defend this place against the attack of a small army. The way matters stand now a few of you are in goodly circumstances, while others are barely making a living. Under a change, every man would share equally in the profits of the mines. Now, in order to work this satisfactorily, it is necessary to rid the town of most of the present inhabitants, and then we have things all our own way, and admit no more residents except by popular vote on the subject."

"But how do you propose to do this? I'm not interested in murder!" said Tom Markward.

"No murder is necessary. There is half of McParland's band—all good reliable men—who wish to join the movement, and more to be heard from. If the present party joins, that will swell our numbers well toward a hundred, which shall be the limit. We will meet, organize, form our rules and regulations, and then I can arrange the evacuation of Shining Bar, at short notice."

"How?"

"Simple as A B C. Send a man in here with posters, stating that a monstrous lead has been struck at some distant place, and thousands of men are wanted, and rich claims are to be sold! What will be the result? There will be a stampede that will nearly clear the town in twenty-four hours. Then we will sail in, and take possession. Those who take no part in the stampede will be forced to leave, except where we find a reliable party, whom we think best to keep with us. How like you the scheme, gentlemen? It is a gigantic one, but there's money in it!"

There was a grim silence for some minutes; then Verner spoke again.

"Come! speak out! All in favor of the motion make manifest by saying I!"

Every voice responded in the affirmative.

"It is well. Mr. Miller and I will superintend the details of this affair, and we will have a meeting here again, to-morrow night, to perfect arrangements. For this evening, the meeting is dismissed. Go singly, as you came."

"Now for it!" thought Denver Doll. "I must get rid of the red-nosed individual, as I do not care to visit McParland's ranch to-night, in this disguise."

Being nearest the door, she arose, and started to take the first leave; but the voice of Miller checked him.

"Hold up, Steward. Wait till I go. I want to see you a moment."

To disobey would have been to give the whole business away, besides risking a shot in the back, so Doll had nothing else to do but await the traitor's motion.

One by one the men left the room, Miller finally joining in the movement and motioning Doll to follow, which she did, her every sense on the alert.

When they were some distance from the Post-office, Miller turned upon her.

"I am going back to the rendezvous," he said, "and I want you to lay shady in this vicinity until I return. I may need you, you see, when I come back."

"Very well. I will be in the neighborhood," Doll replied, and she was not sorry to get out of the scrape so easily, for she had half-expected that he would accuse her of being some one else than Steward.

So Miller turned away toward the route to the mountain rendezvous, and after waiting till she was convinced that he was gone, Doll took her way back to the boarding-house, well satisfied as to the results of her evening's adventure.

Let us devote a few minutes to looking after the man of reportorial proclivities—Charles Pygmalion Jones, whom we left tumbling down the shaft-way of an unworked mine.

So rapid was his descent that he had no time to think of anything, the suction of air nearly taking his breath away.

After a fall of some fifty feet he landed, but luckily in a pool of water some three feet deep, which broke the force of his fall.

He spluttered for some seconds, ere he could get his breath.

Groping about, he soon came in contact with the rocky wall. Having a metal box of matches he speedily succeeded in striking one of the lucifers, and, aided by the light, peered around him.

From the bottom of the shaft a passage branched off. The bottom was rough and covered with water.

Looking above him, poor Jones saw a black, uninviting hole, through which he had fallen. He could not get out of his dilemma in that direction, so nothing remained for him but to explore the passage. Possibly there might be an opening somewhere else.

He started off, keeping one of the passage walls for guidance.

At the end of an hour he found himsef out of the water, and lit another match to ascertain what was the cause. He discovered that the passage now had the shape of a tunnel, and ascended gradually in its course. This satisfied him that he was in what is known in mining parlance as a "drift," and that by following it he would eventually come into the outside world.

So he hurried on with renewed courage, and it was not long ere he gained the mouth of the drift.

Here his surprise increased.

He had expected to find himself still in Shining Bar, and was not. The mouth of the drift was in a tangled thicket, half a mile, nearly, up the gulch, from the outskirts of the town. The drift had been thus made to follow a vein of ore, which had given out directly in under the Monaco, from whence a shaft had been sunk.

Jones was a stranger to the surroundings of Shining Bar, and he was so turned around that for the life of him he could not tell which course he should take to reach the town.

After much deliberation, he settled upon his route and started off in an opposite direction from Shining Bar and for a good hour tramped on, and would undoubtedly still have kept going had not two masked men stepped suddenly from the chaparral into his path, a pair of cocked revolvers in hand.

"Halt!" one of them said sternly. "Who are you, and where are you goin'?"

"I am Charles Pygmalion Jones, reporter for the *Cavortin' Cyclone* of Cheyenne, so don't rob me, for Heaven's sake, as I haven't a copper. I'm going right away to Shining Bar to start a newspaper, and if you will tell me your names I will give you an immense puff—charge you nothing at all."

"Waal! my name is Pilgarlic Pete, an' this is Amazon Alf, but ye better come along ter headquarters, an' see ther capt'in furst. Come! walk a chalk line now, or I'll put a buzzer in your pate!"

"For Heaven's sake, where are you going to take me? I am Charles Pygmalion Jones."

"Don't make no difference. You'se goin' ter see McParland, the road-agent, now."

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUEER WOOING—DENVER DOLL'S LITTLE GAME.

THE morning following Denver Doll's visit to the council-room of the conspirators, Yankee felt decidedly more like himself than he had since he had been wounded. and was up and.out for a stroll by the time the sun began to gild the tree-tops of the mountain.

He wandered out upon the Bar to the point where the river swept around it, and there encountered, much to his surprise, Miss Isabel Verner.

She was seated upon a rock, gazing out upon the water, and a large bowlder being behind her, Yankee did not see her until he was almost be ide her.

Not seeming surprised, it was evident that she had seen him coming.

"Good-morning, Mr. Eisler," she said, with a pleasant smile. "I am delighted to see you."

"Good-morning," Yankee answered coolly. "I was not aware that any one was here."

"I presume not. The bowlder hid me. How are you feeling?"

"Very much improved. The treacherous shot came near doing for me."

"It was such a shocking thing for any one to do. I can't imagine who could have been mean enough to fire the shot. Papa feels badly over it, too, I assure you."

"Over the pepper and salt bath, more likely," Yankee responded, dryly.

"Ha! ha! I was really amused at his plight, particularly as we haven't been on very good terms lately. You see, he wants me to marry a man I despise, and I will never marry any one, unless it is the man of my choice. I hear that poor Dora is really dead, Charley."

"*Did* you? I was not aware that there is conclusive proof of it yet."

"But I understand from papa that she and your child really perished in the mountains. You did so wrong in leaving your home—Dora was such an admirable little wife. I should think you would get lonely without a wife, Charley."

"Without my own wife I am. I would give an arm if it would bring her back to me."

"But you will marry again?"

"Possibly, if I can find some one just like Dora."

"But it would not be a hard matter to find a loving heart, maybe, to fill her place."

"You are speaking one word for yourself and two for me, or *vice versa*—which?" Yankee demanded. "Isabel, I have no desire to hurt

your feelings, so let's change the subject—or better still, I will bid you a pleasant good-morning!"

"Stop!" she cried, arising haughtily. "You are entirely too hasty. Thanking you, I have not the least desire to make love to you. I used to be your friend, but after your cruel treatment of your wife, my cousin, my respect for you ceased. I was just trying you to see how much man your wild career had left in your nature. I am satisfied. Go!"

"I will, thank you. Will you impersonate Mlle. Zoe to-day?"

He watched her like a hawk, as he spoke.

She turned white—then her face flushed crimson with passion.

She could not speak, but stamping her foot, pointed toward the town.

With a smile of triumph, Yankee obeyed her silent command and sauntered away.

"By a hap-hazard shot I fired direct into the right camp!" he mused. "She is Mlle. Zoe instead of Crystal Carrol, whom I first suspected. Well! well! Here's fun! The fair Isabel wants to marry me, and proposed to do it by craft, if she couldn't by fair means. Then there's Crystal Carrol would not mind, I surmise, if *she* got a chance. She also has some reason for desiring the safety of McParland. Isabel, according to her own assertion, is out with her daddy, and it wouldn't be surprising if she was in with the road-agent, since, as Mlle. Zoe, she claimed she could produce the child, which she could not do, except she was in with McParland. Altogether, if I am any judge, things are considerably mixed."

Denver Doll knew that it was important for her to attend the second meeting of the conspirators, to learn what new schemes were to be formed in regard to the plot to seize the Bar.

But, to go in the disguise of Steward, would be to thrust her foot in the fire, literally, because Miller, the renegade, must have found out that Steward had not been out of McParland's camp the previous night.

"The only way I can see, is to have Miller intercepted and held for awhile, so that I can represent him at the meeting, on the plea that he dare not leave camp for fear of creating an open breach between himself and McParland too soon. I think I can trust the boys to the work of capturing him.

Accordingly, she gave her eccentric trio instructions, and sent them forth to capture Miller, when he should approach the town, after which she arranged herself for the character of the Spaniard, Steward.

First of all, let us follow the steps of Walt, Yakie and Chug, and note their success.

Proceeding to the upper part of the town for consultation, they soon got into an altercation as to who should take the lead.

"Hello! What's the matter here? What you rascals quarreling about?" a voice cried, and who should walk in upon the scene but Monroe Miller, who had been attracted to the spot by the sound of excited voices.

Walt recognized him by Denver Doll's description, and quickly drawing and cocking his revolver, he shoved it in front of the outlaw conspirator's face.

"Hands up, Marse Miller!" he cried, emphatically. "You'se jes' de berry huckleberry we'se arter, 'deed you is. Hi! Germany, whose got de lead now, hey?"

"Dot vas mine brisoner! I vas seen him afore you did, so help me!" Yakie blustered.

"Never mind dat, chile. Jest you an rat-eater bind him, while I cubber him wid de persuader, fo' suah! Yah! yah!"

"See here! what does this mean?" Miller blustered, in a rage. "I'll have you infernal idiots strung up for this. Lower your pistol, you black nigger."

"'Deed I won't," Walt declared, a wicked glitter in his black eyes. "You'se my prisoner, sah, an' I'se gwine to hold ye right yar, till you'se boun' fas' an' sure. Han's up, you rascallion, or I sw'ar to goodness ef I don't take de scalp cl'ar offin youh head, suah certain."

Miller could not doubt but what he was done for, so far as the present was concerned, and was wise enough not to resist when they attempted to bind him.

"What am I thus insulted for?" he gritted.

"Denver Doll ordered us to capture you, boss, an' I had de 'stinguished honor of makin' de arrest."

"Denver Doll!" Miller exclaimed.

"Yes, sah, de Ace, Queen an' Trump of all de detectives, sah! She's jes' gwine fo' yoah road-agents like a grasshopper after a hayseed, sah! She's jes' gwine to abscorchulate an' exterminate de hull consarn, for suah!"

"Humph! I think I understand," the conspirator muttered. "It was she who played the part of Steward so cleverly. If I don't get out of this dilemma, the whole scheme bids fair to be frustrated."

Denver Doll had named to her pards an out-of-the-way place, in a transverse ravine, where they should take the prisoner; so, accordingly he was marched off, and the spot was reached in due time, and the outlaw bound to a tree.

A camp-fire was then built, and the three guards squatted around it for a smoke.

After their pipes were out, a vote was taken, to see which of the three should remain on guard, while two of them took a nap.

The lot fell to Chug, and Walt and Yakie stretched themselves out, and were soon fast asleep.

Miller's eyes gleamed with triumph as soon as he heard the stentorian snore of the Teuton, and the accompaniment of the darky.

"If I don't make a break now, there will be poor chances of my getting free," he muttered. "I've a sweet-scented idea that I can work the Chinaman for all he is worth."

Waiting a while longer, so as to be on the safe side, he attracted the attention of Chug with a dismal groan.

"Oh! oh! I have terrible pains in my stomach," he said. "Have you got a drop of whisky to give me, pig-tail?"

Chug shook his head.

"Got no whiskee!" he declared.

"But I have," Miller said. "If you'll release one of my hands a minute, I'll get it, and you shall have a swig of it."

Now, if Chug had one predominating weak-

ness, it was for fire-water, free of expense. He never was known to spend a cent for liquor, nor was he ever known to refuse a treat, where it was "on the square."

He now knew that Miller had been deprived of his weapons, and also that Walt and Yakie were sound asleep.

What harm could there be in getting a drink, when it was free, and there was no danger of losing the prisoner?

Thus he argued, and in a moment more he was undoing the cords of Miller's wrists.

"Mindee, no funnee business, or Chinaman killee, debbil quick, with 'volvee," he cautioned.

"Oh, I'm square as a dollar," Miller replied.

Chug soon had the outlaw's hands free, and stood in waiting, a pistol drawn in his grasp.

"Now, for the whisky," and Miller drew two half-pint flasks from his inside pocket, which were filled with liquor. "Here's one for you and one for me. Drink hearty."

Chug took the proffered flask, and eyed it a moment, suspiciously.

Miller's keen eyes noticed it, and he quickly examined his own bottle.

"See here!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "I have given you the wrong bottle! One bottle contains brandy and the other contains whisky. You have got the brandy. Trade, will you? Whisky is good enough for you."

"Not muchee, allee samee! Me like blandy, allee samee like 'Melican man," and Chug put his finger to his nose as he skurried away to a seat on a log by the camp-fire, quite forgetting to rebind the captive. "Chug velly muchee likee blandy."

"Well, drink away, you rascal. I'll have to put up with the whisky," Miller growled.

Chug gave a grunt and applied his lips to the muzzle of the bottle; nor did he "let up" until the last drop of the liquor was in his stomach.

"Humph! it's but a matter of a few minutes till that fellow's dead drunk," Miller mused. And he was right; the potent liquor soon had the effect of making Chug extremely drowsy, and in ten minutes he was off in a stupor. Then, with-cat like footsteps, the prisoner glided away from the camp.

"Now for Shining Bar, and an exposure of the trick this Denver Doll has so neatly played on us!" he gritted.

In less than an hour, by rapid walking, he was at the rear door of the Post-office building.

Here he paused and peered through the key-hole, but all was dark within.

The meeting had not assembled yet, as it was comparatively early in the evening.

"I will keep shady," he mused, "until the crowd is fully together, then I will step in and see what can be done with this detective fairy, Denver Doll."

He retired to nearly the same spot where Doll had concealed herself the previous night, and waited.

It was not long before Verner made his appearance, and at the understood signal was admitted.

Thereafter, one by one, the men put in an appearance and entered after the three taps and the chirp of a cricket.

Steward, *alias* Denver Doll, came last. She was arrayed the same as the previous night. She approached the door, cautiously looking around her, and was admitted.

"Oh, my sly girl! your game will not work to-night," Miller muttered, gliding forward to the door.

He applied his ear to the key-hole and listened. Verner was speaking.

"Ah! you are on hand, eh?" he was saying. "Where is Miller?"

"It will not be safe for him to leave the camp to-night, and so I will serve in his place and act for him," was the response. "The matter has got to be worked carefully until we are fully organized."

"Yes. Let me see. You are Steward?"

Miller burst into the room then.

"Not by any means!" he cried sternly. "That is not Steward, but is Denver Doll, the detective. She must never be allowed to leave this room alive! If she does, our plans are ruined."

CHAPTER IX.

TWO PLANS THAT DIDN'T WORK.

MISS ISRAEL VERNER had spoken the truth when she told Yankee that she and her father were not on friendly terms. They had not spoken since McParland's last visit to the house, as related in another chapter, and Miss Isabel had promptly left her parental abode, and removed her effects to the boarding-house where she had conceived the idea of impersonating a fortune-teller, in hopes that she might influence Yankee as a victim of her wiles.

She had accordingly left town on one stage as Miss Verner, and returned on another as Mlle. Zoe.

What had partially been the results of her masquerade is well known to the reader.

Anticipating events a couple of hours from the time Miller, the conspirator, had exposed Denver Doll in the rear room of the Post-office, we will follow the movements of Isabel.

Leaving the boarding-house, without being disguised, she walked over to the cigar store of Crystal Carrol, and found the pretty mistress behind the counter.

She looked up, surprise expressed upon her countenance, when she saw the speculator's daughter.

"Good-evening," Miss Verner said, condescendingly. "I have seen you several times at a distance, but I did not know until recently that it was really you, Dora."

"*Didn't* you?" Crystal responded, dryly. "It must have shocked you to have made the discovery. Is this some joke that is out, or is it possible that people cannot read the name upon the sign over the door?"

"A good feint, but you know blood will tell. I always believed you would make a good actress, cousin," Miss Verner went on, coolly.

"Well, I must be growing crazy, or else there are more escaped lunatics in the country than I supposed. *I, your cousin* ma'am? Why, you must be out of your mind."

"Not a bit of it, Dora." Isabel persisted. "I never was more sane. You lucky girl, to be Yankee Eisler's wife; you should never have left him. *Now*, I have got him."

"Yankee Eisler? Oh! you have reference to the handsome gentleman who got shot. Well, I can't say as I would object to having a husband as noble and manly as he seems to be. But you say *you* have him, eh?"

"Most assuredly. I can get little Ethel for him, and when I can do that, why, as a matter of course he is ready to marry me. He really preferred me before, you know, but your baby face prevented."

Crystal laughed outright.

"What an extremely funny person you are," she remarked. "But it will be so nice if Mr. Eisler's little girl can be recovered. When will your wedding be?"

"That is not definitely settled yet—but it will be in a few days," Miss Verner answered, flouncing out of the store, secretly in a great rage.

"I'll take chances on that!" Crystal decided. "If you *are* Mr. Eisler's choice, I shall be surprised, for I do not believe he fancies such eccentric people as you."

Miss Verner had called at the cigar store for the express purpose of testing the matter of who Crystal was, and had got so little satisfaction that she was almost ready to cry.

Leaving the vicinity of the cigar store, she dodged across the gulch, and finally paused before the mouth of one of the mines that was drifted into the side of the mountain.

All was dark and silent, and no one appeared in the vicinity of the place except Miss Verner, but this fact did not seem to discourage her, for she took a seat upon a rock, and waited patiently.

"He will not be long, I guess," she mused. "He promised he would come, and I do not fancy he will forsake me."

She was right. It was not half an hour ere McParland, undisguised, except by a half mask, made his appearance.

"Ah! you are here, eh?" tipping his hat. "How do I find the fair Isabel this evening?"

"Happy, now that you have come," she replied, making room for him on the rock beside her. "I have been waiting ever so long, ready to answer the question you asked at our last meeting."

"Ah! yes—let me see—oh! what was it?" and the footpad king scratched his head as if puzzled.

"Oh! you sly rogue!" and Miss Verner pinched his arm, playfully. "Did you not ask me to become your wife?"

"Well—I—I don't know but I did, Isa—but, then, you see, I hardly fancy you would be content to be an outlaw's wife."

"What care I, as long as I love you? According to your own proposition, deliver up to me the child, and I will marry you, and so have the fortune between us."

"Yes, that would be very nice, but you see—well, in fact, I have made up my mind not to incumber myself with a wife at present. There may be some developments soon which will make it necessary for me to look out for myself. And then, too, I am getting tired of this wild life, and long for something better. The child is on my hands, and I propose to get rid of her, at all hazards, by selling her to the highest bidder. You have a chance with the rest."

"John McParland, you are a wretch, an ingrate, and a deceiver!"

"Pshaw! You don't intend to let me off that easy, do you? Why not express yourself in stronger terms, while you are at it?"

Isabel fairly trembled with passion.

"You know that there are no words adequate to describe you," she hissed. "You have trifled with my affections, and as good as asked me to marry you. Now, then, if you don't stick to your word like a man, I'll be revenged upon you."

"Revenge be it then, fair Isabel, for I cannot marry you. If you wish to put in a bid for the child, between now and the 20th, a letter sent through the Post-office, and addressed to Mr. Jinks, will fix it all right. Adieu, dearest! I am sorry to have to tear myself away, but such is the case. Hope you may get a husband soon."

And then he walked away, with a wicked laugh, leaving her to make out of the situation what she could.

Yankee Eisler had seen Crystal several times since McParland's escape from him, and each time she had spoken pleasantly—so pleasantly, that a strange thrill would go to his heart.

"By heavens, I cannot believe that she is not Dora, despite all her assertions to the contrary!" he would mutter. "It does not seem possible to me that there could be two persons in one world so precisely alike. But I may be mistaken. When it is proven to me that I am, I will believe it."

About an hour before Denver Doll's exposure in the room in the rear of the Post-office, he sauntered over to the cigar store, and paused in the first room where the cigars were kept.

Then he waited some moments, but no one came.

The sound of footsteps overhead told him that Crystal was up-stairs.

A few cards lay upon the show-case. Taking one of them, the Sport wrote upon it, with pencil:

"Dora, my wife; I still love you, and my life will never be complete, without you. Why live this transparent lie, as Crystal Carrol, when you know it is wrong, and I know you were once mine?"

He mixed the card among the others then, and rapped smartly upon the counter.

Shortly after, Crystal made her appearance, and he purchased some cigars. A perceptible redness about her eyes told him that she had been crying, and his heart gave an exultant bound at the discovery—perhaps she had been crying about him!

He said nothing to indicate that he had taken notice of her weakness, however, and after a few words on ordinary topics, he took leave—but not leave of the vicinity.

Making a *detour*, he was soon in the rear of the store he had just left.

Although the shanty was one-and-a-half stories high, a back lean-to or summer kitchen had been added to it, the roof sloping back to within about six feet of the ground.

This was just as Yankee had expected.

By climbing on the roof of the addition, one could easily enter the rear second story window of the main building.

He was tempted to make an entrance, stealthily, into Miss Carrol's upper rooms, in hopes of being able to discover something among her effects that would identify her as being Dora, his lost wife.

It was a risky thing to attempt he well knew, but he was willing to risk a great deal to satisfy himself on this one point.

He took off his boots, and left them on the ground, and then succeeded in climbing onto the roof.

From there he had no difficulty in gaining entrance to the single unplastered room over the store.

A lamp was dimly burning upon a stand, and by its light the burglar-for-love's-sake was able to command a view of his surroundings.

The furniture consisted of a bed, a stand, a chair and a trunk, which was locked.

Some clothing hung upon the wall, but none of it was such as Yankee remembered having belonged to Dora. Nor could he recall to memory any of the trinkets upon the stand.

The trunk was locked, and having no way of opening it, nor any disposition to do so, his search was virtually at an end.

"I've had the trouble for the pains I've taken, and nothing more," he muttered. "I must get out of here before I am discovered."

In this he was quite successful, and his venturesome visit was accomplished without trouble, as he later congratulated himself.

The words of Monroe Miller caused an electrical effect upon the conspirators, in the rear room of the Post-office. Of one accord they leaped to their feet, and revolvers were drawn on every hand.

"What! what is this?" Valentine Verner cried in alarm.

"It's just what I said!" Miller exclaimed. "This person who is personating Steward, is none other than Denver Doll the detective. She has got into our secret, and fearing exposure when I returned to-night, she had her accomplices waylay and capture me. But I escaped, and here I am to expose her."

Denver Doll stood at bay, a defiant expression upon her face, and gleaming from her eyes, while her hand rested upon the butt of a revolver in her belt.

"Is this true—are you Denver Doll, come here to spy upon us?" Verner demanded, turning fiercely upon her.

"Reckon that's about the size of it," was the cool response. "Right well I knew there was some deviltry going on, in which *you* had a hand; and so I thought I might as well find out, and hinder you all I could."

"Curse you! You shall find that won't work. You've either got to join us, or we'll put you where you'll never blab our secrets."

"Reckon I won't join," Doll retorted, defiantly. "I ain't partial to associatin' with thieves and cut-throats. If you let me go free, I'll do all I can to help break up your crowd—you can bet on that."

"Then I'm cursed if you get a chance to interfere, until our plans are completed," the speculator gritted. "I've a good notion to have you put out of the way, in good earnest and forever."

"Use your own judgment about that!" Doll suggested, apparently not in the least worried. "If I am not found by my pards, by to-morrow sunrise, they will know that I have been foully dealt with, and report to our backers!"

Verner started.

The others looked anything but pleased.

"What do you mean?" Verner demanded.

"I mean that I am a regularly appointed detective, and that when I or my aides call for assistance, Uncle Sam is bound to furnish it. There chances to be a company of cavalry in this vicinity now, and they are my backers, when I choose to call upon them. As I said, if a hair of my head is harmed, my comrades will notify the military forces, and they will make Shining Bar far too lively for *you*. Every member of your sneaking league is known to my men!"

"A clearly manufactured lie—but it won't work!" Verner declared. "Surrender and permit yourself to be bound, or you will be shot where you stand."

Doll knew not what they intended to do with her, but she was well satisfied that no good could come to her by attempting resistance, for every man in the room had a weapon drawn, ready for emergency.

"I suppose I shall have to accept, as you are too many for me. But you can bet that I'll turn a trump yet, before the game's up."

At Verner's suggestion cords were procured, and the brave girl's hands were bound behind her, and her weapons taken from her.

"I have a place in view where I can take her and secrete her!" announced Verner.

A consultation was then held in an undertone, after which Denver Doll was gagged and blindfolded, and then seized by either arm, she was led from the cabin.

In ten minutes they had reached the river, where she was forced to enter a boat, and Verner entered after her, and pulled out across the dark, forbidding stream toward the opposite shore, which was lined with gloomy pines.

The boat was not long in reaching its destination, when the speculator ordered Denver Doll to disembark. He then took her by the arm, and led her along, for perhaps a mile, when she suddenly felt a rope thrown around her and she was drawn tightly against a tree.

Ropes were then wound about her and the tree, at different places, so that it was impossible for her to stir.

"There!" Verner exclaimed, with triumph. "You are in Wolf Gorge now, and safe from troubling our tribunal. When the wolves get hungry, they'll give you a call. Good-by!"

Doll did not answer, but listening, heard him walk away.

Perhaps her feelings could better be imagined than described.

She felt that her doom was sealed.

CHAPTER X.

THE STAMPEDE, AND A BOUNCE FOR THE BRIG AND CHIEF.

THE next day was the nineteenth day of November.

To several persons considerable interest was attached to the fact.

Early in the morning there rode furiously down into the town a horseman—an old, white-whiskered, shabbily-dressed pilgrim, who, judging by appearances, had rode long and fast.

As he dashed along through the main street, he blew loud blasts upon a cavalry trumpet, with the evident intention of arousing the town.

And to say he succeeded, would be drawing it mild.

In a very few minutes literally the whole population of the camp was gathered in front of the Post-office, where the eccentric stranger was engaged in tacking up a huge poster, which had been written out in pen print or rather with a lettering brush, by some one who was evidently familiar with the art.

With intense eagerness did the folk of Shining Bar devour the contents of the poster, after it was nailed up, and the reading thereon, created a more instantaneous commotion than had anything in the way of a sensation that had struck the town for a long while.

Eagerly, over and over, was the bill perused, and this is the information it contained:

"EXTRAORDINARY NOTICE TO EVERYBODY!

"*Greatest Discovery Ever Known!*

"Richest mines just opened at Wildcat City, that the world has ever seen! The earth strewn with nuggets— he quartz assays two thousand dollars to the ton. Claims for sale. Mechanics wanted. Five thousand men, women and children wanted instantly, to work. The bearer of this notice will act as guide. Ten dollars, and upward, a day guaranteed every one. MARKS & Co., *Owners.*"

If the reader has ever had a chance to become acquainted with the nature of the average class of inhabitants of western mining-towns, it will not seem strange that such a notice should set the ball of excitement a-rolling.

Western history records more than one instance where moderate-paying camps have been depopulated in a day, in favor of some new and promising strike.

And the effect on Shining Bar of the above notice was but a repetition of what other camps had experienced.

First one man declared farewell to Shining Bar, and made off to pack up his few worldly effects; then another followed suit, and another, and another, until the movement became a stampede.

Conspicuously prominent in urging on the sanguine aspirants for fortune was Verner, and often he slipped a ten-dollar gold-piece into the hand of some rather doubtful pilgrim, saying:

"Go ahead, pard, and don't shirk when a chance is open for you to make a stake. If you ever get able to pay this back, remember who urged you on; if you don't, it will neither make nor break."

Invariably this would break all resolutions to stay in Shining Bar, and the pilgrim would be added to the general hegira.

By noon the train was ready to start, and when it moved away up the gulch, not over a score of people were left in Shining Bar, and those were such as Verner had personally ordered to stay with him.

So far his unparalleled plotting had worked well.

As soon as the stampeders were safely away from the camp, Verner and Monroe Miller started for the camp of McParland, the outlaw, where, by prearranged orders, all was to be ready for the capture of McParland and such of his men as would not join in the movement.

The journey was accomplished without incident.

The rendezvous of the road brigand was located in a small mountain-locked valley, many hundred feet above the level of Shining Bar, where a searcher would hardly have expected to find a camp.

There was one large strong cabin, and several smaller ones, formed in a circle about the retreat, the center being used as a sort of plaza and corral for the horses.

When Verner and Miller reached this valley, none of the band were visible about it—so they made their way to the largest cabin and entered.

There were fifty or more men in the apartment, all gathered about the tables, but there was scarcely any notice taken of the entrance of the two conspirators, who had masked themselves like the rest of the band.

McParland himself was seated in one corner, engaged in playing cards with one of his men.

Miller and Verner advanced to where Steward the Spaniard was seated alone at a table.

"Well! is everything all right?" Miller asked in a low tone. "Have you made any progress?"

"You bet! Every man in the room, except McParland, has joined the movement."

"Good? I'll close the matter!"

He walked over to where the captain was seated, and leveled a revolver at him.

"Mac, the jig is up!" he said, grimly. "The boys have got tired of you as a commander, and also of this camp. So we've gobbled up Shining Bar, as a place of rendezvous, and have elected Val Verner captain, in your place. You are our prisoner."

That McParland was somewhat surprised was evident, but he controlled himself with remarkable coolness.

"Is *that* so?" he said. "Well, I've had an idea for some time that there was mutiny brewing, and am more prepared than you imagine. I tender my resignation with all willingness, having made up my mind to retire from the profession for once and all time."

"You bet you'll retire!" Verner added, with a chuckle. "We are going to make you a prisoner and leave you here, under guard, until we can communicate with Uncle Sam's blue-coats, who are said to be in the mountains, when, if we can get any reasonable reward out of them, we will let 'em have you for hemp-stretching purposes."

"Curse you! Is *this* the sort of gratitude

you have, after all I have done for you, you wretch?"

"Just about. You'd have given us up to the military if we hadn't got too smart for you, so you've no cause to growl. Throw up your hands and allow yourself to be bound, for resistance is useless with all the odds against you!"

No commander ever knew his own men better than did McParland.

Death would be the only way of escaping capture; so he held up his hands, a proud smile upon his face.

"Proceed!" he ordered. "I think too much of my fine flock to attempt to clean them out. I am your prisoner, through your strategy, and I surrender with the best of grace."

At a motion from Verner several of the outlaws bound their deposed captain securely, both hand and foot, and then, with the aid of hooks and staples driven into the wall, they fastened him thereto, so that he was a prisoner in the fullest sense of the word.

"There you are!" Verner cried, triumphantly. "You make a fine appearance, too, as a prisoner of war. By the way, where is the child? I will take that back with me to Shining Bar."

"Will you, though?" McParland sneered. "I rather fancy not. The child is in safe hands, where I deemed it advisable to place her, in anticipation of some such an event as this. When *you* set your buzzard talons on her it will be when I forget myself."

"Curse you! If you do not give me that child I will murder you! To-morrow is the 20th day of November."

"I am fully well aware of that. The child will never come in for a claim upon the inheritance! I have sent it away where the search of a lifetime could not discover it. As for murdering me, you human wolf, I suppose that is your privilege."

"And I will improve it, too!" he hissed, snatching a pistol from his belt and cocking it; but Miller hastily knocked it from his hand.

"Fool!" he cried, "the man is not for you to kill. We want a reward for him. Have a care how you rush things, or I'll put *you* in irons before you know it. Come! I propose that all hands strike out for Shining Bar. Zinga, you will stay here and guard the prisoner."

The proposition was received with a grunt of approval by the band, and so Verner had no choice but to accompany them without securing Ethel Eisler or even accomplishing his vengeance.

Zinga, who had been left to guard McParland, was a brawny half-breed, with a treacherous eye, but he made no effort to harm the master he had served so long.

On the contrary, he amused himself by sampling the stock of liquor behind the bar, and his samples were so liberal that he soon became as happy as a lark.

"Zing git debbil drunk!" he said, approaching McParland, with a couple of bottles of the choicest whisky on hand. "Like fire-water, ugh!"

"S'posing you let me loose, to get a swig, too!" the outlaw suggested. "We'll have a *ge*lorious time, you bet."

But Zinga, crafty of instinct, winked his eye knowingly.

"No let Mac free!" he replied. "Get Mac whisky, dough!"

He went back to the bar, and procured a bottle of the worst "p'isen" the ranch afforded, and then approached McParland.

"Open mouth. Zinga pour down throat!" he chuckled, villainously.

"You go to thunder. I won't drink!" the ex-chief growled, perceiving that he had got himself into an unenviable dilemma, for he knew strangulation would attend Zinga's attempt to treat him.

"Open mouth—drink—or Zinga scalp!" the half-breed threatened, and he attempted to force the nose of the bottle between McParland's teeth.

That he would eventually have succeeded, is probable, had not an unforeseen accident occurred to him.

The sharp "ping!" of a rifle was heard; Zinga dropped the bottle, and staggered back to the floor—dead!

The next instant the door opened, and a person entered.

McParland started!

Of all persons in the world, this was the one he least desired to see. If he had had hopes for his life, before, they all faded away, now.

The person who entered, was none other than Miss Isabel Verner, and there was a decidedly triumphant expression upon her face.

"So I have you, have I?" she hissed, exultantly. "You thought you would never be troubled by me again, didn't you? but you find out otherwise. Isabel Verner is not the girl to be trifled with, and scorned. I swore I would have revenge on you, and I am here to fulfill my promise!"

"So I perceive!" McParland replied, calmly. "You have things all your own way, now. Go ahead!"

"Not too fast. I am here to be revenged, but I want to look out for my own interests before I look out for yours. First of all, where is the child?"

"Whose child?"

"Do not provoke me with unnecessary questions. You know perfectly well what child I mean—Ethel Eisler, of course!"

"Oh! Is *that so?* Well, my beautiful Isabel, I would respectfully inform you that pretty little Ethel is alive and well, and will come promptly to time as Gabriel Porter's heiress. By this time, the executor knows that she lives, and consequently, you and your villainous father are baffled!"

"Oh! no! never!" Isabel cried, in a frenzy of rage. "I will yet have the child and the fortune. I will find out what Miss Crystal Carrol knows about the young one!"

She stood a moment as if in doubt what to do—then, her hand was upraised and with a keen-edged knife she struck McParland fiercely in the breast.

Turning, with a wild laugh, she fled from the cabin, leaving her victim alone in his misery.

CHAPTER XI.

DENVER AND YANKEE SHAKE HANDS.

LET us return to Denver Doll, whom we last saw a prisoner in Wolf Ravine, beyond the river, where Valentine Verner had left her to the not very tender mercy of the ferocious inhabitants of that wild locality.

But, thanks to the fact, it was not yet late enough in the season for wolves and bears to be very bold and ravenous, and this gave the girl detective a little hope that she might not be troubled by them.

But even though she was not molested by wild beasts, she well knew that starvation stared her in the face unless she was rescued by some one, and the probabilities were not very favorable that she would be; hence, the outlook was anything but pleasant.

The night dragged slowly away. She heard wolves howl, but none approached her, and at last the welcome rays of early dawn crept into her dark, forbidding place of captivity.

This was cheerful, and somehow she felt imbued with a strong hope of escape.

But the lining of the silver cloud was false.

The morning passed away slowly.

Not long before noon she heard a heavy, shuffling tread, and soon after a huge cinnamon bear made his appearance.

It paused, with a sort of whine, at sight of Doll, as if surprised to see a human being there—then it raised up on its hind legs and lumbered forward, with the evident intention of making a square meal out of the fair prisoner.

Doll's face turned deathly white, for the prospect of being torn to pieces was horrible.

Nearer! near the brute came, with jaws distended and tongue lolling, when—

Suddenly there was the sharp report of a rifle, and Bruin flinched and turned in the direction whence came the shot.

A moment later there was another shot, and the bear staggered and fell to the ground.

Then, out from the undergrowth, across the ravine, strode no less a personage than Yankee, rifle in hand.

Denver Doll gave a glad cry at sight of him.

Here was rescue at last, when a moment before death seemed most imminent.

"Thank Heaven it is you, Mr. Eisler!" she said, as he approached her and cut her bonds. "I had about given up the ghost for good."

"I have been searching for you ever since I saw Verner return to Shining Bar last night, when I suspected the truth," Yankee replied. "Since leaving Shining Bar I have also made a great discovery."

"What is it?"

"There has been a stampede of the miners to some other town, and McParland's road-agents, under Valentine Verner, have taken possession of the camp as a stronghold. McParland was left a prisoner in their former road-agents' den, and Verner proposes to turn him over to the Government, providing a suitable reward is offered."

"How did you learn this?"

"I captured a road-agent a few minutes ago, whom Verner had sent over here to see if you were yet alive. I frightened the information out of him, and he will, providing we let him go free, show us to the old rendezvous, where McParland is confined."

"Then let's go at once. You have but limited time now to secure your child, and I have a bone to pick with the gent myself."

They accordingly left the place where Doll had been confined, and a short walk brought them to where the outlaw was tied to a tree.

"We have concluded to make terms with you!" Yankee said. "Conduct us at once to the spot where McParland is to be seen, and we will allow you to leave the mountains."

"It's a bargain!" the prisoner said. "Release me, and I will take you there by a surer and safer route than by the way of Shining Bar."

"See that you do; and remember that if you make any attempt to lead us into a trap, your punishment shall be death. On the other hand, show us to McParland's ranch and you shall have your liberty."

He cut the fellow's bonds then and they started down the bank of the river, crossing it half a mile below Shining Bar and climbing into the mountains.

By the outlaw's guidance they reached the little valley in due time, and halted at some distance from the cabins.

"You remain here," said Roberts, the guide, "while I make a reconnoissance, to learn if it will be safe for you to advance."

He strode away, and returned shortly, with a nod.

"You will find McParland tied up in the large cabin," he said. "I suppose you are done with me?"

"Yes, you can go. But hold! we may need you to show us the way back to Shining Bar; so you had better wait till we go, and I will pay you well."

But Roberts was too fearful of being given up, and no words could keep him from taking a hasty departure.

After he was gone the Sport and Denver Doll crossed the valley to the large cabin and entered.

The sight that met their eyes caused them to utter simultaneous cries of astonishment.

McParland was tied as the road-agents had left him, and his clothing below the wound was dyed red with blood, while a pool of the same was gathered at his feet on the floor.

He was not dead, but had lost consciousness from the weakening effects of his great loss of blood.

"By Heaven! there's been devilish work here," Yankee cried, pointing from McParland to the dead half-breed. "If the gang did this work there is no hell one can imagine that would be too good for them. This is no time to think of revenge, Dolly. We must revive this man, or the secret of the whereabouts of my child is forever concealed by the barrier of death."

"You are right," the girl replied. "Although this man and I are sworn enemies, I will do all in my power to revive him."

They cut the outlaw's bonds and gently laid him on the floor.

From the bar Yankee procured liquor and administered it to him, and then dressed his wound.

After an hour of steady application of such

restoratives as were to be had, the stricken man finally opened his eyes and was conscious.

He seemed surprised at the sight of Doll and Yankee, for his gaze roved from the face of one to the other.

"Why did you touch me?" he gasped, faintly. "Why did you not let me die?"

"For the simple reason that you are too valuable a man to let die just yet," Yankee replied. "I have a little account to square up with you, and so has Denver Doll here."

"Neither of you will any longer have reason to curse me, for I can make reparation for what wrong I have done," McParland said. "All I want of you is your assistance to get me to some place where I can die in peace, and I will surprise you."

"How do you mean?"

"I will tell you as soon as I get a little stronger. If you will get me a drink—"

Denver Doll procured some water, which the wounded man eagerly quaffed. He then rested a few minutes, when he once more spoke, addressing his words principally to Yankee:

"This girl," he said, indicating Doll, "has been my enemy for years, and she has helped to drive me to do many bad things by her persistent dogging, which otherwise I probably would not have done. I am her half-brother. There was a bitter feud in our family, some years ago, and my step-mother used every effort to keep me out of property that came to me by my father's death. And finally she succeeded by bribing the jury to whom the case was left for decision. I had no way of redress, and was bounced out upon the world.

"Knowing my temper, and fearing that if I remained around my native town I would seek revenge, she fastened a crime upon me which necessitated my flight. But she reckoned without her host. I had my revenge. Of her two fair daughters, I plucked the fairest, and abducted her. A bloody knife was found, and the charge of murdering and making way with her, was laid upon my shoulders, and Doll, my half-sister, set out upon my trail, like a relentless blood-hound. All this happened, Yankee, before I turned up in your vicinity, and we became enemies because we loved one girl. To you, Denver Doll, I have no apology to make, as I have never harmed you nor your sister Gerty!"

"What! Do you mean to tell me that my sister still lives?" Denver Doll cried, excitedly, the light of joyous anticipation gleaming from her eyes.

"I mean to say exactly that. She has been with me, and been one of my warmest friends, since I took to outlawry. She can vouch for herself that I have been a most tender captor."

"But where is she?"

"In a safe place; I will perhaps tell you later."

He then asked for more water, which was given him, after which he turned to Yankee, a strange expression in his face.

"You've sworn to kill me, I believe?" he said, interrogatively.

"You couldn't well count me as sinning, if I did kill you!" Yankee replied, coolly. "You have done me irreparable injury!"

"So you think. But you reck' without your host. I lied to you the other night—but stop! I will make a clean breast of it. You and I both loved Dora Porter, and she married you. It hurt me to lose her, but I resolved to bear the loss, if she was happy. But when I saw she was unhappy, through your recklessness and inattention to her, the devil prompted me to once more pay attention to her.

"Well, you know how you ran away and left her. It partly crazed her, and when I tried to prevail upon her to come to my protection, she repulsed me, and shortly after fled away into the mountain districts with her child. A spirit of revenge set upon me, and I followed. For weeks I failed to find her, and in the mean time I organized my band of road-agents. Finally, one wild November night, I came across her and the child, both about half-starved and frozen. I told her then that if she did not become mine, I would kill her. She scornfully refused, and I struck her down in my hot anger and fled in horror at my crime. But I did not go far. My accusing conscience turned my footsteps back; the Almighty commanded me to return and try to save her whose life I had attempted. I went back. I found her body and removed it to a mountain cave. In going for her body, I had discovered the child in Denver Doll's camp, and concluded to leave it there temporarily. In the cave I donned the disguise of Sir Ralph Raphael, and set about the task of bringing the dead to life. I do not think man ever worked harder or prayed harder than I. And at last I was rewarded. She came back to life, but it was a long while ere she was well enough to walk. By my assiduous attention I won her respect and gratitude, if not her admiration; so that she finally told me her story, little suspecting that I was acquainted with it. She spoke kindly of her truant husband, but declared their paths in life, forever hence, lay apart. Finally I offered to start her in the little business in Shining Bar, to which she consented, on the conditions that she pay me back dollar for dollar, and that she has done. The child I recovered and placed in the hands of Denver Doll's sister, who took the best care of it. For Dora my love revived, and I quietly pushed my suit. But it is destined that she never shall be anything to me. Yankee Eisler, your wife and child still live in good health. You are now at liberty to fulfill your oath of vengeance!"

And the road-agent folded his arms, an expression of satisfaction upon his face.

Yankee gazed at him a moment in meditation.

"If what you say be true," he said, "I certainly have not much cause to be revenged upon you. But to-morrow is the 20th of November, and I want my child."

"It matters not whether you possess the child to-morrow or not, so far as the Porter inheritance is concerned, for I have informed the executors, some days since, that the child is alive and well, and in your possession. Now that you see I am really not the wretch you picture me, I will propose terms: Since the desertion of my men, I have resolved that if my life is spared, I will abandon this wild career, and by

a reputable life atone in some degree for my past. If you give me my freedom, I will tell you where to find those who are dear to you; then we will shake hands and part friends, if you care to allow me to enter into a better life, where by good acts I may be able to partially redeem myself."

There was a momentary silence, and then Yankee answered:

"For my part, I have nothing to say. You are free to go, and it shall be my prayer that you lead the life in the future 'of an honest man.'"

"As my duty as a detective I should arrest you," Denver Doll said, thoughtfully. "But if you swear that Gerty is safe, and will truthfully tell me where I can find her, I shall not claim you as a prisoner."

"It is a bargain, and I shall expect you to fulfill your part of it, for all my friends having forsaken me, I am literally homeless and friendless. The child Ethel, and the two women Dora and Gerty are, so far as I know, at Crystal Carrol's. At least, I sent Gerty there with the child, late last night, before I knew definitely of the mutiny. I would advise you to go there secretly at once, and get them out of the camp, as Satan alone knows what Verner would not do, should they fall into his clutches."

"You are right," Yankee assented. "Do you feel able to ride?"

"I think I could bear up long enough to get me at a safe distance from this accursed spot."

"Very well. There is one horse remaining in the gulch. We will help you off."

The horse was procured, and the wounded chief assisted to mount. A stock of edibles and liquor was put in his saddle-bags, and bidding Yankee and Denver Doll a sorrowful farewell, he rode slowly away out of the gulch, to be forevermore lost to the world as the terror of the trail under the famous name of McParland, the road-agent.

"I reckon we have acted in the wisest way, after all," Yankee observed, as they watched him ride away. "There's the making of a man in him yet, and I guess we were right in giving him a chance. And now, let's get back to Shining Bar. There may be lots of work for us to do yet, before we get at those we seek."

"Ay! and mark you, we will find the route into the town guarded, so we shall have to go careful."

They were about leaving the gulch when groans attracted their attention to one of the smaller cabins, not far from where they were passing.

"Let's investigate," Yankee suggested. "Some one is in trouble, that's patent."

They crossed the valley and entered the cabin.

The sight that met their gaze was one that caused them each a smile of wonderment and amusement.

The author of the groans was the *Cyclone* reporter, Charles Pygmalion Jones.

He was tied to the wall, in an immovable position, and was attired in woman's clothing, having been deprived of his own.

A most laughable-looking girl he made, to say the least, and it was evident that McParland had appreciated the fact when he substituted the masquerade.

"Hello! *Cyclone*," Yankee saluted, with a hearty laug.. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh! he's takin' items for the *Cavortin' Cyclone*," remarked Doll. "What a beautiful-lookin' gal he is, anyhow."

"I ain't," Jones growled. "I was captured by the road-agents, and have them to thank for this fix. Oh! the experiences I have passed through would fill a large volume of prose. I have already enough matter on hand in mind, to keep the *Cyclone* a-going for years."

"I presume you'll take the breath away from the wind with your effusions. But we must be going now, Yankee."

"What! what! are you not going to take me along? Free me, oh! free me, or I shall die!"

"Well, we will; but you've got to go back to Shining Bar in the same togs you've got on," Yankee announced. "There's no others in this camp; and besides, I wouldn't have you spoil your present beauty, so come along, as we've no time to lose."

Jones's bonds were out, and having no choice but to go in the dress he wore, he followed his deliverers from the gulch, looking and feeling decidedly sheepish.

The journey back toward Shining Bar was not attended by any incident worthy of mention, until they were within about a mile of the camp, when they suddenly came across a party of six soldiers, under the command of a lieutenant, whom Denver Doll remembered of having met before.

The recognition was mutual, and the lieutenant said:

"You are just the person I most wished to meet. I want to know what sort of a mining-camp that is down the gulch. I went down there with a squad of men this morning, and after losing three was forced to beat a retreat."

"You were lucky to get off so cheaply," Doll replied. "McParland's road-agent gang is in possession of the town, and it will take a good troop to root them out, as they are well fortified.

She went on and related what was known of the mutiny, and the *ruse* by which the gang had gained possession of the camp.

"Things don't look quite so bright as they might, that's true," Lieutenant Larrowe said, "but I'll contrive to break up this sort of business. I reckon we'll camp here in the vicinity, while I send one of my men back for the rest of my company. Will you two join us?"

"No; I will go on and reconnoiter, and perhaps may be able to get into their camp and rescue those who are dear to me," Yankee replied. "When your men come remain here for a time, and I will try to report what is the condition of affairs in the camp."

"If you go I'm with you," Denver Doll said. "Jonesy, you better stay here and write up your article for the *Cyclone*, and maybe you can make a raise of a suit of clothes among the crowd."

And Charles P. was of the same opinion. Since learning of the condition of affairs at Shining Bar, he was not so particularly anxious

to venture there, especially in the raiment of a woman.

Denver Doll and Yankee took their departure toward Shining Bar, bent upon the rescue of Dora, Gerty and little Ethel, if they were in the camp.

The walk to the vicinity of the outskirts of the town was accomplished without incident, when they halted, and after a short consultation Doll crept cautiously on in advance to reconnoiter.

In a few minutes she returned.

"There are six men doing guard duty below here, and the prospects of getting past them are not encouraging," she said, dubiously. "The only way I can suggest to get past them is to overpower one of them and put on his togs, including the mask, and then allow the other one of us to slide by. The are positioned across the gulch, at intervals of about fifty feet, and by pouncing onto one the nearest to one side or the other of the gulch, I think it is possible we might make a go of it."

"We can but try," Yankee assented.

And with catlike movements they glided forward, bent upon capturing one of the guards and making their *entree* into Shining Bar in spite of the barriers that had been placed to oppose them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BIG SURROUND.

CRYSTAL CARROL, had taken no part in the stampede. She had half suspected some deviltry back of it all, but having full reliance on herself, had made up her mind to stay and see the whole business through.

Besides, Gerty, the sister of Denver Doll, had come to her, during the night preceding the stampede, bringing with her little Ethel, and a note from McParland, which said:

"DORA:—I send you, herewith, your child, and the woman who has taken care of it since it has been in my possession; the woman is my half-sister and a sister of Denver Doll. Realizing that there is no longer any use of aspiring to the rightful possession of yourself, I am going to forever leave the West, and try to begin life over again, in some other place. Forgive me for the wrongs I have done you, and go back to him who loves you, and is repentant for the past. J. McP."

And knowing it would not then be safe to expose little Ethel in Shining Bar, was another reason why Crystal, or Dora, as we shall hereafter call her, did not join in the stampede.

She secreted Gerty and little Ethel in the upstairs room, and patiently awaited the reappearance of the handsome Sport, Yankee.

When Verner returned to the Bar, accompanied by the road-agents, she comprehended the situation, and became fearful that she had done wrong in not joining in the exodus.

But it was now too late to escape, so all she had to do was to be brave and hope for the best.

It was the middle of the afternoon before she received a call from any one, and then it was from Valentine Verner.

"Well! well! so *you* are here yet, are you?" growled, as he entered the store.

"Certainly! Who has a better right?" the plucky woman demanded. "I've got an eye that's not in the habit of closing at every thin dodge—hence, I didn't enthuse at all when the stampede took place."

"Humph! perhaps you'll be sorry you didn't. I don't believe the gang will allow a petticoater in the town."

"It won't try their nerves, I fancy, if I mind my own business. And besides, I don't intend to be either wronged or insulted. The first person who offers to put me out of the town against my will, I will shoot through the heart, and the same sort of a dose is waiting for his comrades. I've taken my stand here, and I'll fight it out on this line if it takes all winter."

Verner looked surprised, for he knew but little about the spirit and pluck of the young woman. He had supposed that he would have a soft thing in subduing her, and either molding her to his will, or else forcing her to leave Shining Bar.

"Oh! talk is cheap," he sneered. "I fancy three-score of men ought to be able to conquer one weak woman, so there's no use for you to be saucy to me, as your fate rests entirely in my hands. Do you know that I have made up my mind who you are, girl? You are Dora Eisler."

"If you think so, you are welcome to your belief. Several other persons have cherished such a fancy, but have got left. Understand, Mr. Valentine Verner, that I am not a bit afraid of you, and if you make any more of your threats in my place, I'll just salivate you right where you stand."

And she suddenly shoved a pair of formidable six-shooters over the counter at him.

He leaped back with a snarl.

"Take care! don't shoot!" he cried; for, at the muzzle of a pistol, a more arrant coward never lived than Valentine Verner. "You are too hasty, my dear young woman."

"Well, be that as it may, if you are not hasty in getting out of my house, there will be need of an undertaker here, you bet! One, two, three—*get!*"

The fire in her eye warned him that it was death to disobey.

With a growl of rage, he shook his fist at her, and took his departure.

"He will be back again, I'll wager. He's a bad man, and I'm afraid that I've undertaken more than I can handle," Dora muttered. "But I will stand game to the last!"

She went up-stairs and told Gerty of what had happened, and cautioned her to keep little Ethel very quiet, lest their presence in the house should be detected. Then she returned to the store, and waited.

The afternoon crept away, and shadows began to hover over the town, but they did not lessen her anxiety.

She dreaded the darkness, for with it would come peril to her and the ones she wished to conceal.

In turning over some cards upon the showcase, she came to one Yankee had written and left there.

With feelings better imagined than described, she perused the message, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"I have done wrong to deceive him about my identity," she murmured. "But, God ha- -ent

me back my child, and perhaps He will send me my husband. Then I will hope for a new life. Poor John! villain though he has been, he has earned my gratitude, for he brought me back to life after attempting to kill me, and then gave me up after all."

Deeper and deeper the gloom increased in the gulch, and with its oncoming increased Dora's foreboding, for she was well satisfied that Valentine Miller would not long allow matters to remain as they were.

At last, when darkness had settled down in earnest, Dora saw a number of the road-agents pause in front of her store, as if waiting for somebody, or something.

The somebody proved to be Verner, for as soon as he made his appearance, the whole crowd flocked into the store, the speculator in the lead.

Dora stood behind the counter, with a pair of revolvers drawn and cocked, ready for use.

There was a defiant expression upon her face, too, which told that she would stand for her rights, to the bitter end.

"Well, you see I'm back!" Verner said with a sneer, "and I dare say you understand the significance of my coming."

"I see that you are afraid of me, and had to run for reinforcements!" Dora replied, scornfully.

"And I got them, too. Consequently, there is nothing for you to do but to come to my terms. Either you have got to pack your duds, and leave this town, or marry me. I've been looking for a wife for some time, and don't know as I could make a better selection than yourself. These are emphatically my terms!"

"That is a matter of very slight importance to me!" Dora answered, calmly, but with intense resolution. "I am not afraid to die, and I may as well die defending myself, as to submit to insult at your hands. Remember that I have got the drop, and I'll make some one sick before I get through with you!"

Verner hesitated whether to give an order to his followers to charge on her, or not, for he felt sure that she would fire at him first, and likely kill him.

So that he was literally at bay again.

"Well, if you won't surrender in one way, I can make you in another!" he cried turning on his heel, and leaving the store, followed by his men.

Dora quickly locked the door after them, and ran up-stairs to peer out of the window.

Gerty and little Ethel were huddled in one corner, their faces showing that they were alarmed.

"Cheer up!" Dora encouraged. "If I mistake not, there is a good chance for us yet. I have again sent Valentine Verner off, and it is to be hoped he will stay this time!"

From neither the front nor the back window could she see anything of the enemy, and she, therefore, concluded that they had retired to the Monaco, to consult on the best plan of securing their point.

So, bidding Gerty to be hopeful, she once more went down-stairs, remembering that she had left the back door unlocked.

On reaching the lower room, to her surprise, she beheld Yankee and Denver Doll entering through the neglected door.

With a glad cry, the Sport sprung forward and clasped her to his breast, and this time she did not refuse him, but clung to him affectionately.

"Thank God! we are at last reunited," Yankee said. "Is Ethel safe?"

"Yes. She is with Gerty up-stairs."

"Then we must make our escape from here at once."

"It is too late now!" Denver Doll cried, "for the building is being surrounded!"

Examination proved this to be correct. The outlaws had assembled, *en masse*, at both ends of the shanty, and it was but a few minutes ere the crackle of flames was heard!

"By Heaven! they have fired the house!" Yankee cried. "It is now surrender or perish by fire!"

"Then let us all die together, rather than have little Ethel fall into Val Verner's hands to be murdered," was Dora's resolve.

"So say I!" Denver Doll cried. "But let us not yet despair. There may be a chance, after all!"

And her words were prophetic, for suddenly shouts and rifle-shots were heard from a distance, to which the outlaws responded.

"The soldiers! the soldiers!" exclaimed Yankee. "They have come in the nick of time."

It was true.

With a determination for victory Uncle Sam's boys advanced, and the rain of bullets swept away the lives of the desperadoes like chaff before the wind. Some, by skillful dodging, escaped with their lives, but they were few.

When the battle was over—for it was of short duration—our friends in the shanty had just time to escape from what before had promised to be a fiery tomb, and there was great rejoicing in Shining Bar among those who gathered to their protection.

There is little to add.

The soldiers had swooped down on the Bar, guided by Reporter Jones.

Among the dead were found Valentine Verner, his daughter Isabel, Monroe Miller, and Burke, the faithless Vigilante chief.

Of the other characters we have dealt with, Yankee Eisler with his wife and child is now living happily in Philadelphia, where also is Charles Pygmalion Jones, who is still aspiring to be a newspaper man.

Gerty, Denver Doll's sister, has married Lieutenant Roberts of the army.

Denver Doll, with her pard Yakie, is still doing valuable detective duty in the West.

Walt Christie has gone out of the detective business, and now handles the razor for a livelihood.

McParland has embarked in a paying business, in an Eastern city, and with a good wife to aid him in his efforts, is rapidly acquiring a competency.

Shining Bar is still a prosperous town, but there is little there of the excitement that there was prior to that all-important 20th day of November.

THE END.

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